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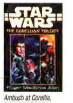

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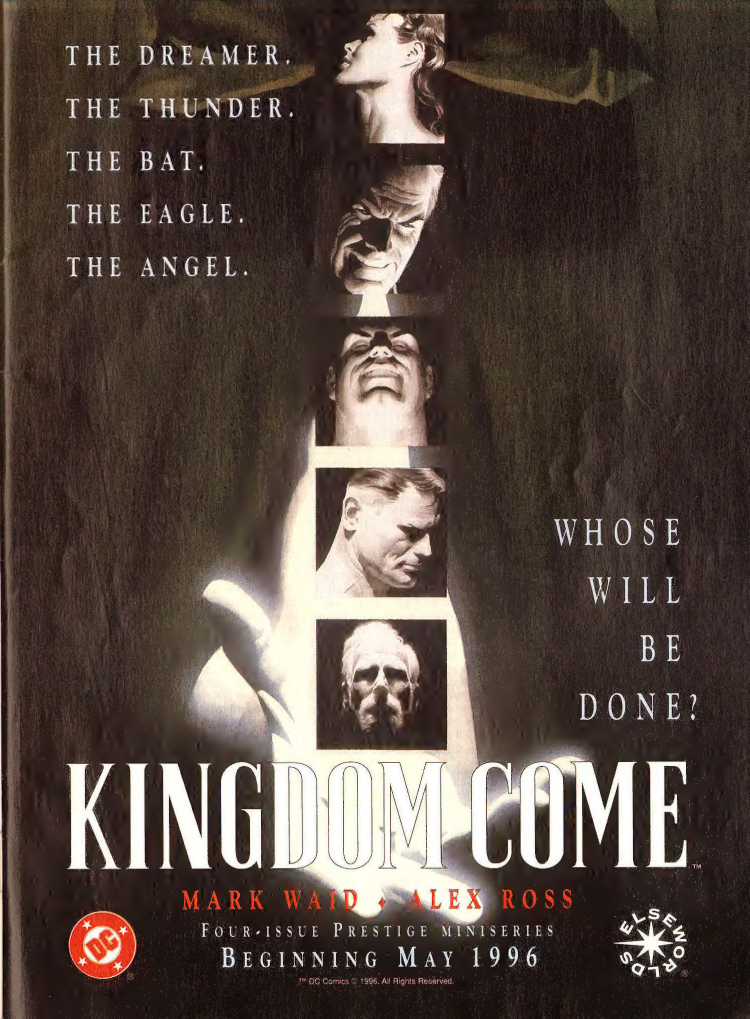

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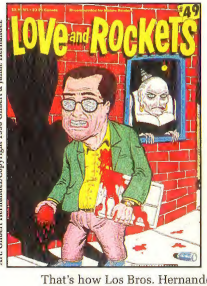
Comics, Comics, Comics!

WORD BALLOONS

Normally, I try to tie this editorial in with the stories that appear in each issue of COMICS SCENE. This time, however, I'm going to concentrate on what's *not* in this issue. For every deserving comic profiled here, like Jason Lutes' *Jar of Fools* (page 56—oops, broke my rule already), there are hundreds that never appear in these hallowed pages. We operate under many restraints at COMICS SCENE, not the least of which is space. There are only so many pages in each issue, and only so many issues in a year.

So, while quite obvious commercial concerns drive us in the direction of in-depth inquiries into just whose idea those nipples on Batman and Robin's costumes in *Batman Forever* were (Alfred's, apparently), there are a host of titles that lose the battle for column inches against such subjects of interest to inquiring minds. Still, I know that out there in the night, many an artist toils away creating pages of comics just as worthy of your attention. That is why I recently stopped by my local comic book store and chose five such worthwhile subjects that haven't made it into COMICS SCENE in the recent past.



Art: Los Bros. Hernandez/Copyright 1995 Jaime, Gilbert & Mario Hernandez

***Love and Rockets* #49:** "I wouldn't call this an end by any stretch of the word." "A grand new beginning is more like it." That's how Los Bros. Hernandez put it themselves in this, the second to last issue of their acclaimed comic *Love and Rockets*. After over 10 years, *Love and Rockets* is really coming to an end. Of course, there's some question whether their attitude, as portrayed by Gilbert in this issue, is serious or not, and since they go on to rant about the next phase of their careers—"Men will cower, women will swoon!" "The women—oh, God, yes, the women!"—we can pretty much figure it is not.

Since we last heard from Jaime and Gilbert back in CS #29, they have taken their familiar cast of characters to new heights in such challenging extended stories as Gilbert's "Poison River" and Jamie's "Wigwam Bam." But while they continue to receive critical praise for their work, the popularity of *Love and Rockets* has never skyrocketed, even in the post-*Watchmen*/*Maus* "comics are for adults too" era. So, Los Bros. are off to try their hand at new characters and to work on a movie version of *Love and Rockets*.

This issue finds Gilbert contributing an assortment of short, crazy strips in a variety of different styles. In one, he portrays himself considering whether or not to take on a neo-primitive style to gain respect as a serious artist. In another, more cartoony strip, a young boy's good day goes horribly wrong. Jaime, for his part, has stuck with Maggie and Hopey and their friends to the end, and promises a conclusion of sorts to their saga in issue #50.

Art: Ron Garney/Copyright 1995 Marvel Characters, Inc.

***Captain America* #450:** Well, well, *Captain America* is good again, so what is Marvel gonna do? Give him to Rob Liefeld to "re-imagine." Until Robbo gets his mitts on Cap and turns him into the shelf-chested anatomical mockery the preview art promises, we'll have to content ourselves with this last hurrah.

Writer Mark Waid and penciller Ron Garney begin their "Man Without a Country" storyline in this issue, and it features Cap back the way we like him: no armor, no cybernetics, full Super Soldier powers. It's just Captain America, proud and strong as he ever was. Only now he has one little problem: He has been accused of treason and stripped of his citizenship. Waid has gotten to the heart of it here; if you want to hurt Cap, don't cripple his body, strike at the patriotism that has been the character's one constant since Joe Simon and Jack Kirby first created him decades ago.

It should be a pleasure to watch Captain America struggle alongside the elusive Sharon Carter to undo the damage to his reputation wrought by the Red Skull in recent issues. The long heritage of characters like Captain America is pretty much all Marvel has left, and it's a shame to see

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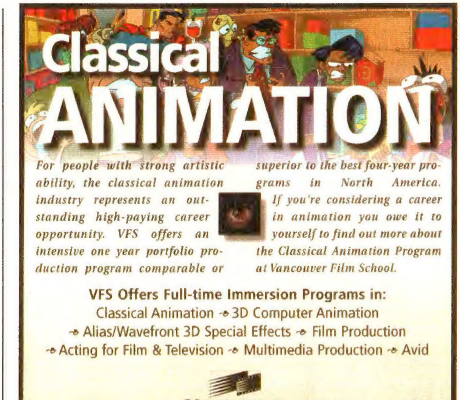
Art: Elizabeth Watasin

them throw away a creative team doing that heritage proud in a desperate play for short-term profits.

***Action Girl* #6:** For a break from all the arty angst and testosterone-fueled super-heroics filling the shelves, check out Sara Dyer's fun *Action Girl Comics*. Now in its sixth issue, this charming black-and-white anthology collects the work of women cartoonists from across the globe. *Action Girl* retains a lot of the personality and immediacy of Sarah's *Mad Planet* zine while giving professional exposure to a host of intriguing artists.

This issue features a strip by comics veteran Roberta (*Naughty Bits*) Gregory detailing her brush with a soon-to-be sniper. Dyer herself provides some cool paper doll outfits cataloging Action Girl's pop culture "Role Models of Style." Best of all, ultra-talent Elizabeth Watasin showcases both her Japanese-influenced and cartoony styles in a piece called "Morning," starring the excellent not-a-superhero Flying Girl. Elizabeth's own zine *The Adventures of A-Girl* is highly recommended!

Action Girl has its own web page at: http://www.io.com/~rmartin/actiongirl.html. Check it out!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***Impulse* #12:** Speaking of fun comics with a Japanese influence…Bart Allen is the kid superhero called *Impulse*, "a refugee from the 30th century stranded in a backwards time not his own." A descendant of Barry Allen (a.k.a. the Flash), Bart spends his time in the 20th century doing all the regular sorts of things a kid would do: loading up on junk food, playing video games and, oh yeah, getting involved in occasional pan-temporal super-speedster team-ups.

Art: Humberto Ramos/Copyright 1998 DC Comics, Inc.

When you set aside the complex Flash family relationships and the crossovers, *Impulse* is a fun little book. Written by the above-mentioned Waid, it concerns itself with teens without coming off false or condescending. Issue #12 ends Bart's team-up with his cousin Jenni from the future's Legion of Super Heroes. Her visit ends with the pair speed-learning video games as well as guitar and sax. Humberto Ramos' big-eyed, big-footed renderings of the characters convey sufficient whimsy to make the whole package a pleasant read and a refreshingly straightforward, coherent comics experience.

Aliens: Mondo Heat: You know the drill: Some folks on some remote outpost are being preyed on and our hero is called in to do the dirty on the Aliens, who it turns out were brought in intentionally by some weasely guy. Nothing ground-breaking in that plot, but *Aliens: Mondo Heat* has a couple of things going for it. First is the art by *Batman: The Animated Adventures* storyboard vet Ronnie del Carmen. It might be tough to imagine the above scenario illustrated in a clean line style reminiscent of the Batman animated look, but it's exactly that approach which makes the book feel fresh. Del Carmen's Aliens are suitably creepy; his Mondo is super-tough but believable; and his missing nubile young girls are stunning, to say the least.

Art: Ronnie del Carmen/Copyright 1998 20th Century Fox

The second key to the success of *Aliens: Mondo Heat* is writer Henry Gilroy's sly, hyped-up script, which sends his hero after what are essentially a pair of farmers' daughters and arms him with an absurdly gigantic—and beyond phallic—weapon. This angst-free, tightly-paced tale gives a new meaning to bang for the buck as Mondo vaporizes Aliens in high style while keeping up a steady banter with the sarcastic young ladies.

—*Michael Stewart/Managing Editor*

The Black Dragon

By JOE NAZZARO

In the mid '80s, writer Chris Claremont teamed up with British artist John Bolton to create *The Black Dragon*, a heroic fantasy series set against the backdrop of medieval England. Ten years later, the six-issue Epic Comics series is being repackaged by Dark Horse as a 184-page graphic novel, giving a new generation of comics fans a chance to experience *The Black Dragon*, out of print for nearly a decade.

According to Bolton, he and Claremont had been looking for a project to do together for some time when the idea for *The Black Dragon* came along. "We had done *Marada the She Wolf*," the artist recalls from his London studio, "which also had a checkered history, because originally it was meant to be Red Sonja. It laid on the shelf for a year, and Jim Shooter finally said, 'I give you the character back, it's all yours; do with it as you wish.'

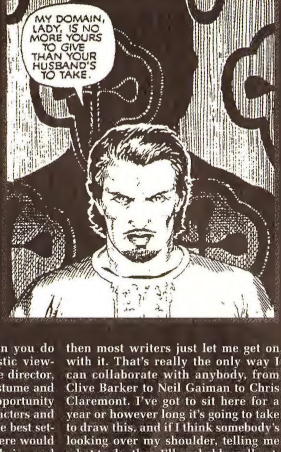
"Anyway, we did that together, for *Epic Illustrated*, and it was quite successful. Chris and I wanted to continue in a similar vein, but with a more realistic style to it, i.e. set it in a real time, the 12th century, and it just went from there. There was a story in Chris' head that he wanted to get down on paper, so we talked about it and expanded it, and lo and behold, *The Black Dragon* was born."

For the uninitiated, *The Black Dragon* chronicles the adventures of James Dunreith, Duke of Carynth, a Scots border lord. Exiled by King Henry II, Dunreith has traveled the world as a crusader and adventurer, until news of Henry's

The Black Dragon stars James Dunreith, a 12th-century Scots border lord who discovers that the boundaries between the mortal world and faery are growing thin.

Returns

Artist John Bolton looks through the mists of time at a tale a decade old.



death brings him home. There, he finds the boundaries between the mortal world and faery growing thin…

In order to make *The Black Dragon* as authentic as possible, Bolton says he did a fair amount of research into the period. "Without being too anal about it, there had to be some believability that you were setting this in the 12th century. Having real people added substance to that, it gives the story a resonance—the characters *do* exist and the costumes *are* authentic. I always believe that if you build from a realistic base, then the fantasy actually becomes that much more fantastic because of the contrast between the two. You can only get that if you're sympathetic towards the characters, that you actually believe, in a sense, that they exist.

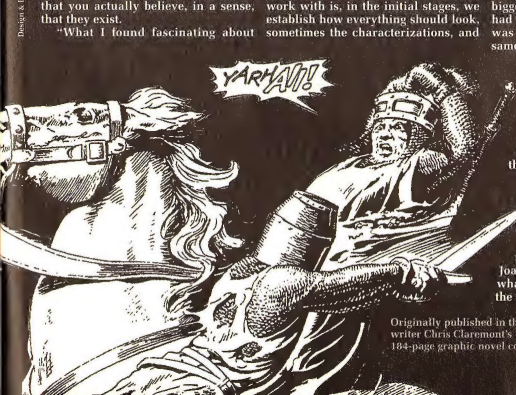
"What I found fascinating about *The Black Dragon*, is when you do comic strips, from an artistic viewpoint you are everything: the director, the lighting engineer, the costume and set designer. That's a great opportunity to come up with all the characters and create what you think are the best settings for them. Obviously, there would not be a story without Chris, and there's no point in coming up with a comic strip/film if the story is rubbish, so that's the most important thing to start off with."

Once Claremont had written the script for *The Black Dragon*, Bolton pretty much had free rein in putting his artistic stamp on it. "What tends to happen with anybody I work with is, in the initial stages, we establish how everything should look, sometimes the characterizations, and then most writers just let me get on with it. That's really the only way I can collaborate with anybody, from Clive Barker to Neil Gaiman to Chris Claremont. I've got to sit here for a year or however long it's going to take to draw this, and if I think somebody's looking over my shoulder, telling me what to do, then I'll probably pull out. As I sent the pages over, I'm sure that if Chris had said something like, 'I think this character is bloody awful,' I might have reconsidered, but that never happened."

Having spent a significant amount of time creating his cast of characters, Bolton has a few personal favorites. "Certainly the main character, because he was there on every page. The biggest problem was Robin Hood. I had to come up with a Robin Hood that was relatively different, but at the same time still recognizable. So many Robin Hoods have been done, from Errol Flynn to *Robin of Sherwood* on TV in the '80s, which contemporized the character. That probably gave me the most difficulty, coming up with something that I was satisfied with. In the end, it's something between *Robin of Sherwood* and Errol Flynn.

"There were a number of characters that presented their own problems, such as Robin Hood and coming up with the fairies. For some reason, one of them looks like Joan Blondell from the '30s, so maybe what influenced me on that front was the 1930s *Midsummer's Night Dream*.

Designs & Layout: Luis Ramos



Originally published in the mid-80s, artist John Bolton and writer Chris Claremont's *The Black Dragon* returns as a 184-page graphic novel courtesy of Dark Horse Comics.

"When you do comic strips, from an artistic point-of-view you are everything: the director, the lighting engineer, the costume and set designer," observes Bolton.

I don't think you should limit yourself as to your influences, but as long as the end result is that your influences are channeled *through* you, it will gel. You have to use everything as an influence, but ultimately, it all has to knit together."

In terms of artistic influences, sharp-eyed readers may notice a touch of Harold Foster, whose long-running *Prince Valiant* is still the watermark for medieval fantasy strips. "Harold Foster's probably the only artistic influence; everything else is probably cinematic, from Alfred Hitchcock to *Midsummer's Night Dream*.

"It's almost impossible to try and re-create something set in the Middle Ages and not at least taking a look at Foster. He had so much time to accumulate reference; that's all he ever did; a page a week allowed him to do so much research that I must admit to using Foster as a shorthand. You do as much research as possible, but you don't draw everything that you find, you just adapt it. Otherwise, you're just drawing the same old tired things. So, looking at Foster, looking at film; even the Sean Connery *Robin and Marian*; all these influences, sometimes you just take what you remember, but the most important thing is you're presenting a new interpretation. There's no point in just re-drawing something that already exists."

Despite his extensive research for the book, Bolton preferred illustrating the fantasy aspects of *The Black Dragon*. "Drawing realism can be quite boring. That's when you have to rely on things like angles and characterization, whereas once you get into fantasy, it's just your imagination, and you can make it as dark and filthy and decrepit as you can scrape from the bottom of your brain, as it were. Once the two characters [James and Ellianne] metamorphose from real people into crystal-like demons in the third issue, that was a roundabout turn for me. Prior to that, I was still really interested in trying to re-create the period, so even with the realistic characters, because of the setting and costumes and everything else, there was still enough in there to maintain my interest."

All manner of unholy threats are encountered by Dunreith on his travels. He must learn to fight the supernatural with supernatural power of his own.

"Once the two characters metamorphose from real people into crystal-like demons in the third issue, that was a roundabout turn for me," notes Bolton.

And the interest of the audience, apparently. *The Black Dragon* was successful enough to spawn a sequel, albeit in a slightly different medium. "That was *Dragon Moon*, an illustrated book. It started out as something like eight color plates and 40 black and white illustrations, but once we started, they ended up printing the whole book in color because I was doing the artwork in two-color anyway. I find it very difficult to work in black and white now, so everything I do is in color, even if it's just monochromatic.

"The characters actually appear in both books, so it's certainly a sequel, but because of the way Chris wrote *Dragon Moon*, it doesn't follow on directly, because it's a contemporary setting. There had to be some sort of

"I had to come up with a Robin Hood that was different, but at the same time recognizable," Bolton says.

segue if you like, from reality into fantasy, so that's what Chris has done."

In terms of *The Black Dragon* now being reprinted 10 years after its original release, the artist has somewhat mixed feelings. "I don't know how popular that particular subject matter is," he admits. "*Braveheart* has touched on this, and that was successful, so if it's a quality item, then it will sell.

"As far as bringing it out 10 years later, that's fine. I don't know if there's ever a right time to bring something like this out. The fact that it's in black and white, to me, is another reason to bring it out. The way things were done at the time, the way the color was laying on the paper, made the whole thing incredibly bright so that it lost any of its subtlety. I did do all the color guides, but I

"I will have withdrawal symptoms if I stay away from comics; I need my comics injection!" enthuses Bolton.

was never totally happy with the end result, even though [editors] Jo Duffy and Archie Goodwin did their utmost to give Chris and me what we wanted. Looking back at it now, it is quite garish by comparison to say, what I would create now."

Naturally, the perfectionist in Bolton wouldn't mind tweaking his decade-old work just a bit, but for the most part, he's able to be objective about it. "I look back at it and think somebody else has done it, which I think is the only way you can look at it.

"That's how I felt about it then, and my work is so different now that there really wasn't any point in changing it. I think maybe I might have thickened a couple of lines up, and added a bit of grass here and there, but that would have been it. Ten years down the line, I can look back at it and still appreciate what I did."

Bolton has had no end of projects to keep him busy since his last COMICS SCENE profile (#25). After his collaborations with Clive Barker, the artist teamed up with Neil Gaiman on the first issue of the *Books of Magic* series. "That was another project that I enjoyed immensely.

My approach to whatever I do is to try and create an individual approach to that project, whether it be a comic strip or a cover; you try to create a scenario around that image.

"With *Books of Magic*, I had the opportunity to do that page after page, to come up with the witches done in a woodcut style, to the Japanese scene, to the Egyptian and so forth. You knew that you would come in the next day and be able to do something completely different, and yet it was for the same project. I enjoyed that very much."

One of Bolton's favorite comic-related projects was the *Army of Darkness* mini-series based on the third of director Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* movies. "*Army of Darkness* is probably some of the best work I've ever done. I adapted the book from the original screenplay, and had the luxury of including what Sam couldn't afford to include.

"There's a scene in a room where an old hag comes to life, and a fight ensues between Ash and the old hag. In the original script, as in the comic, that scene takes place in a temple, she turns into a witch and pushes all the columns down and crushes everybody. If I want to do something in a comic, it just means an extra day for me to paint it. To do that in a film means setting up a medieval temple, with an old hag transforming and people being crushed, with special FX required for the columns to fall down. I could include all of that in the comic, while

According to Bolton, Harold Foster and Alfred Hitchcock were among the influences on *Black Dragon*.

due to pressure and financial problems, Sam couldn't. I'm a great admirer of Raimi's work, so that was a bonus."

Of course, 1995 saw the long-awaited release of *Batman: Man Bat*, on which Bolton collaborated with writer Jamie Delano. Previewed back in CS #34, *Man Bat* seems to have been a rather long time in coming. "I was abducted by aliens!" jokes Bolton, before offering a more serious explanation.

"I was actually working on something like three different projects at the time, one of which was *Army of Darkness*, which started out as 60 pages, and grew into this 70-page, three-issue

(continued on page 62)

All art: John Bolton©, copyright 1964, 1995 John Bolton & Chris Claremont

Jerome Siegel (1914–1996)

The writer whose youthful imagination conceived the first costumed superhero, Superman, died of a heart attack January 28 at age 81—surviving co-creator Joe Shuster by four scant years.

Both creator and creation were born in Cleveland, Ohio—Jerry Siegel on October 17, 1914 and Superman circa 1933, when Siegel and Shuster were high school students and publishers of one of the earliest SF fanzines, *Science Fiction*.

The writer's wide reading interests birthed a hero who was truly unique, yet drew inspiration from sources as diverse as John Carter of Mars, the Scarlet Pimpernel, Doc Savage and Philip Wylie's 1930 novel of a doomed superman, *Gladiator*.

Siegel recalled the moment of inspiration this way: "I am lying in bed counting sheep when all of a sudden it hits me. I conceive a character like Samson, Hercules and all the strongmen I ever heard of rolled into one."

The genesis of Superman was a rejection-plagued one until Siegel and Shuster's long-unsold newspaper strip was cut up for inclusion in *Action Comics* #1, June 1938. Along the way, a frustrated Siegel had approached other artists to visualize his creation, including Mel Graff and Russell Keaton. Ultimately, he stuck with Shuster. By 1940, the pair were splitting over $100,000 a year, despite having sold all rights to their character for reportedly $130.

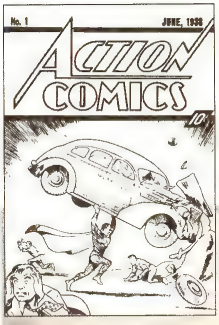
For DC, Siegel also created and scripted a variety of early features, including Slam Bradley and Dr. Occult. Even after Superman took off, he produced such concepts as the Spectre for *More Fun Comics* and the Star Spangled Kid and Stripesy, as well as Robotman, for *Star-Spangled Comics*.

Upon returning from the Army in the mid-40s, Siegel was unhappy to discover a Superboy strip running in *More Fun*. It was an idea he had not explicitly sold DC. A successful lawsuit led to the writer's estrangement from the character and his creation, then enjoying multimedia exposure in radio, cartoons and movie serials.

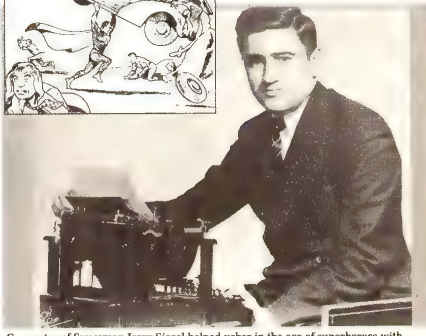
Moving on, Siegel created and scripted a number of short-lived new titles, including *Funnyman* with Shuster, *Nature Boy* with John Buscema for Charlton and *Jon Juan* with Alex Schomburg. During his tenure as Ziff-Davis comics editor, he created *Lars of Mars* with Murphy Anderson, and the long-running *G.I. Joe*.

Returning to DC in 1959, Siegel, under editor Mort Weisinger, resumed scripting the Man of Steel, initiating Superman Mythos innovations such as giving Lex Luthor an origin and the concept of imaginary stories. He created many of the Legion of Super-Heroes characters and scripted *Tales of the Bizarro World*. It was during this period that Siegel's maturity and versatility shone. Shifting gears effortlessly, he would pen classics like the 1961 imaginary story, "The Death of Superman" and humorous shorts for *Lois Lane* in which his hero was often humiliated by that pesky girl friend—perhaps reflecting Siegel's own love-hate relationship with the Man of Steel.

Siegel's working method was unusual. He would write a prose version at high speed, then adapt it into script form. His work, almost always unsigned, can be identified by word balloons filled with trademark *awps, urks, gulps, gaahs* and *sobs*.



Undoubtedly the lowest point in Siegel's long career was when, as Jerry Ess, he scripted the camped-up *Fly-Man*, *Mighty Crusaders* and a revival of *The Shadow* for Archie Comics in a dumbed-down version of the Stan Lee Marvel style then taking comics by storm. In 1963, he briefly scripted the Human Torch in *Strange Tales* as Joe Carter, a pen name inspired by wife Joanne Carter. A 1966 attempt to renew the Superman copyright in his own name led to his final divorce from the character.



Co-creator of Superman Jerry Siegel helped usher in the age of superheroes with *Action Comics* #1.

After his Superman and Archie Comics work dried up, Siegel scripted for various British and Italian comics weeklies, virtually disappearing from the U.S. comics scene until his successful 1975 campaign to wrest from DC Comics a lifelong pension for himself and Shuster.

His final comics effort, a twist on Superman called the Starling, was published by Eclipse in 1983 but failed to catch on.

Although his character ultimately outgrew him, Siegel was both a pioneer and visionary. During the dark Depression days before Superman finally sold, Siegel read of Tarzan's merchandising success and realized the same thing could happen with his still-unpublished creation.

"We visualized Superman toys, games and even a radio show—that was before TV—and Superman movies. We even visualized Superman billboards. And it has *all* come true."

No doubt, Superman will thrive 100 years after Jerry Siegel's passing. The never-ending battle continues.

—Will Murray

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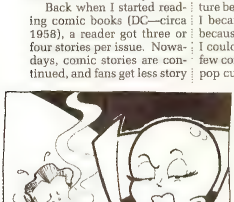
...Comic books *aren't* a good entertainment value these days. They cost too much and comic buyers don't get much for their money.

Back when I started reading comic books (DC—circa 1958), a reader got three or four stories per issue. Nowadays, comic stories are continued, and fans get less story in a whole issue than I used to get in six to eight pages.



Art: Bob Muleady

THE WRONG GIFT TO BUY MOONDRAGON.

Also, comic buyers get *much* less art per issue than in the past. Comic artists draw bigger—there are fewer panels per page, and if anything, less background and detail per panel.

I date the beginning of the death of comics to the sale of DC Comics to Warner Bros. I figure that the previous owners of DC saw that the comic book was dying and Warners bought DC to increase merchandising of its characters and franchise them to bigger media.

As Will Murray pointed out in CS #53, per-issue sales of comic books have long been in decline. Back in the 1960s, the prime years of my comic book obsession, DC routinely cancelled a title when the per-issue sales dropped below 180,000 copies. Do *any* comic book titles sell 180,000 copies per issue regularly these days?

As a pulp magazine fan(atic)/scholar, Murray ought to know that the pulps became mass media/pop culture because *they were cheap.* I became a comic book fan because as an un-affluent kid, I could easily afford to buy a few comics each month. I like pop culture, but comic books have moved from being pop culture to being inbred specialty fare.

CD-ROMs are a better entertainment value than present-day comic books. I'm sorry to see comics go, but I hope they are reborn as hi-tech pop culture. I would *love* to see cheap monthly interactive CD-ROM comics, with continuing characters (like Batman or the Justice League) and multiple features—like most comics had up to the early 1960s.

Bob Stump
rstump@ix.netcom.com

...I would like to state clearly that many comic book fans, myself included, disapprove of the Scarlet Spider saga. The story was clearly created to boost sagging Spider-Man comic book sales, which is pretty understandable to everyone. But, the Scarlet Spider Saga is too unfair to Marvel fans who have read and enjoyed the original Peter Parker *Amazing Spider-Man* stories over many years. The appearance of Ben Reilly and the Spider-Clone twist is very confusing, with a lot of discrepancies about the actual plot.

Marvel Comics has probably succeeded in improving the sales of all their Spider-titles, but I'm not buying any of the old or new ones again until they bring back the one, true Peter Parker, not Ben Reilly (who is supposed to be the real Peter Parker from the past). They should make Peter Parker the original, and keep Ben Reilly as the clone, not vice versa.

Think about it; all of Peter Parker and Spider-Man's exploits in the past were fake, since he was just a clone. A lot of Marvel Comics fans hate the whole idea, as well as the story.

It's really up to Marvel Comics to decide that their precious sales are up, to rectify the Spider titles as soon as possible. So it's sales versus what the loyal fans want.

Uchenna Paul
Nwachukwu
Address Withheld

We agree that the clone saga was a mess, and so, apparently, do the new Spidey powers-that-be. They're now planning to undo as much of the damage as possible.

...Thank you for COMICS SCENE's recent in-depth article on cyber-goddess Teri Hatcher of *Lois & Clark* fame. I've been an avid, addicted fan since the pilot and am constantly amazed and delighted how this fun-filled fantasy just keeps getting better and better.

And, although the special FX are fantastic, the plotlines action-packed and exciting, the supporting cast solid and authentic, the real main attraction of this latest Superman series is definitely the seductive, captivating chemistry between Teri Hatcher and Dean Cain, shown to full advantage in your beautiful photos, making them the most stylish, energetic and sensual dynamic duo on TV.

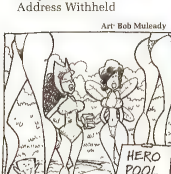
Art: Bob Muleady

SPECTRE, THE SHADOW, PHANTOM STRANGER AND GHOST RIDER AT A CAMPFIRE...

Tongue-in-cheek adventure intermingled with a sweet, mesmerizing romance unfolds like magic before the viewers' eyes with each new episode. Hatcher and Cain as Lois & Clark make "old-fashioned" love "in fashion" again. And Teri Hatcher's rendition of Lois appeals to both men and women.

Therefore, it's not surprising that this version of the time-honored Superman saga is a supercharged megahit.

Mary Bennett
Address Withheld



Art: Bob Muleady

"WHO INVITED THESE IMAGE GIRLS?"

...In your latest letter column, I noticed most everyone commenting on *Batman Forever* said or implied that they would like Sam Hamm back writing the script for the next film. I, too, feel that the film series needs Sam Hamm to return, as do most of my friends. What I propose that you, as an active member of the comics press, do on your new COMICS SCENE Online site, is take a poll: Would you like to see Sam Hamm write the script for *Batman IV*?" and send or e-mail the results to Joel Schumacher and Warner Bros.

The series *needs* Hamm. The last two films focused too much on slapstick villains. Continue that trend and the series will die prematurely. Even the writers of *GoldenEye* would do a better screenplay than Dan Waters or Akiva Goldsman.

Hank Leja
Troy, MI

You got it, Hank. It's too late to get Hamm involved in the next movie, but we'll take a poll on the inevitable Batman V. *Fans with access to the Microsoft Network can visit the COMICS SCENE site (GO: Comics Scene) and cast their vote.*

DOCTOR BRUCE BANNER KICKS NITRO'S ASS!

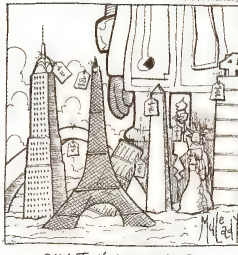
...Can someone please tell me what is happening to the *Batman* film series? In 1989, Warner Bros. released a film that reinvented the entire "comic-book movie" genre, a film noir that was sleek, dark, intelligent, gothic, dazzling and sophisticated. *Batman* assured many fans that '60s camp was dead forever! I find it sickeningly ironic that the film with that word in the title (*Forever*) would be the beginning of what could turn out to be the end.

I'm addressing the plans for the next chapter, *Batman and Robin*. We haven't really gotten to know four of Batman's greatest, most interesting and best-known villains, thanks to two weak scripts that attempted to weave *two* villains into each one (when we all know that one villain is enough to carry the film), and now they want to introduce *two more*? We haven't even had an entire adventure with Robin yet. Unless you consider that three whole minutes he was at Batman's side at the end of *Forever*, and now they want to introduce *Batgirl*?! Of course, more stars!! $$Kaching$$ If you're going to go that far, why not bring on one of the Culkins as Batmite!

We'll turn what was once (for much too short a period of time) a superior series into a goofy freak show! How's about it, Warners???

Batman Forever was proof that Joel Schumacher has little knowledge of Batman as a character. I liked the movie when I saw it in theaters, but when reviewing it on home video (after watching the original first), it showed me how shallow and empty the film ultimately is. It's entertaining, sure, but once you clear away all the frosting and sugar, what is there? The plans for the upcoming *Batman and Robin* give me chills with their nonchalance about cramming as many characters as they can into the mix to ensure the picture's success. *Batman Returns* was far from perfect, but at least it wasn't made solely to make money. You could tell Tim Burton really cared about his characters in the movie, namely the Penguin, even if audiences did not.

Art: Bob Muleady



GALACTUS' YARD SALE.

The villains in *Forever* were mere stick figures. Besides the coin and the nifty clothes, Two-Face could have just been called "Bad Guy #2," because he certainly didn't behave like the Two-Face comics fans know and love. Maybe that's why they came up with "Harvey Two-Face." Jim Carrey delivered the goods as the Riddler, but he still leaned too far towards Frank Gorshin's moronic portrayal on the old TV show than a more intelligent version of the character. And, dammit, neither of them were evil (or serious) enough!

The mystery of Batman is gone. So wonderfully handled in the first film (The line: "There ain't no Bat" as Batman's silhouette drifts downward in the background), has been reduced to, what? Him sitting in a courtroom as Harvey Dent tries to put away Boss Maroni? "It's the car, right? Chicks love the car." That was really cute, by the way. How long before Val Kilmer and Chris O'Donnell are stuck inside a gigantic birthday cake with a voice saying: "How will our heroes get out of this? Tune in next time...same Bat-movie, same Bat-theater!" ???

My suggestions for *Batman and Robin* (not that they'll do any good) are: Keep it simple. Make it just Batman and Robin vs. Poison Ivy, or Batman, etc. vs. Mr. Freeze. Forget about having 600 villains and 250 sidekicks for Batman and work on the story itself. Sure, it may mean bigger box office the other way, but it's also overkill, and people will get tired of it *really* quick. If Schumacher listens, there may be some hope for the series yet.

James Ferace
P.O. Box 125
Ledyard, CT 06339

...The article on *Sailor Moon* (#54) was excellent! As a fan of *Sailor Moon*, I am well aware of storylines bordering on soap-opera and American visions vs. Japanese traditions. The only problem was that the voice characterizations were not credited, including the singers of the theme song. My friends think the former TV hostesses Pink Lady (who sang a minor '80s hit "Kiss in the Dark") do the theme, while I think it's someone else!

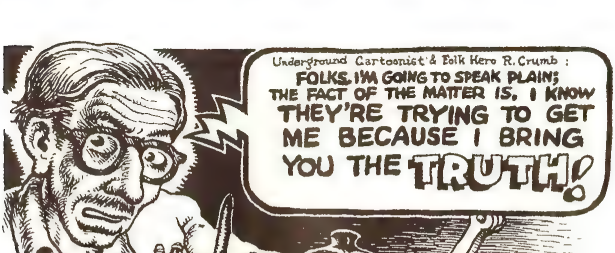
I also liked "Toby Danger" on the classic *Freakazoid!* Why not spinoff "Toby Danger" as a half-hour show *à la Pinky and the Brain*? "Toby Danger" is one of the better parodies that *Freakazoid!* has wrought.

Kim Kruithoff
2128 Dewey Street
Sioux City, IA 51109-1104

Art: Bob Muleady

"CATNIP IS NOT A CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE!"

A TRAIL O


Underground Cartoonist & Folk Hero R. Crumb :
FOLKS, I'M GOING TO SPEAK PLAIN; THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS, I KNOW THEY'RE TRYING TO GET ME BECAUSE I BRING YOU THE TRUTH!

Director Terry Zwigoff peels the lid off of Crumb, *the Oscars & American hypocrisy.*

By MARC BERNARDIN

Everybody has friends. Well, most of us do at any rate. Some have arranged a "lease with an option to buy" relationship with people just so they'll have someone to sit with at dinner and in movies. But how many people have friends as interesting as Robert Crumb, seminal cartoonist and underground comic book legend? I don't. The closest I've got is a guy who knows all the lyrics to just about every KISS song—and if you don't think that's interesting, there's something very wrong with you.

Terry Zwigoff had been friends with Robert Crumb for more than a decade before he decided to direct a documentary film about him, or more precisely, a film about the Crumb family. And they *are* film-worthy. If you've never seen the film, you must, because the Crumb family is weird with a capital "W." Not that I'm one to throw stones—my family doesn't fit the Norman Rockwell vision of Americana either—but between Robert and his two brothers, Maxon and Charles, you have three stooges who were perfect for celluloid pseudo-stardom.

"I never thought of Robert Crumb as the subject of the film," explains Terry Zwigoff of his longtime friend and comic book legend.

"I never thought of Robert Crumb as the subject of the film," says Zwigoff. "I *always* thought that his family, certainly these three brothers, was what the film was about. I had known Robert for 15 years before I even had a thought in my head about making a film. I don't think I would have ever made a film had I not gotten to know his two brothers a little bit.

"It was piecing together their story that made an interesting plot. The story was how these three brothers were all incredibly gifted artists, but there was all this craziness going on and the rivalries and all this great drama involved."

F CRUMBS

Despite the fact that all three brothers were brought up in the same environment and they were all talented men, only Robert went on to "fit in" to society. Charles was a manic-depressive who never moved out of his parents' house and coped with life through medication (until he committed suicide before the film's release) and Maxon is a sex offender who lives in a one-room flat and spends a few hours a day sitting on a bed of nails. Where did Robert go right?

"It's a complicated issue. When a lot of New York critics reviewed the film, they said that *Crumb* was about the healing power of art. You know, that the fact that Robert could get this stuff out on paper is what kept him sane and that was the difference between him and his brothers. I don't think it's quite that simple. All three of them managed to get these fantasies out on paper, but Robert's were able to be seen by people and he got this constant feedback and money and girls and fame—that's the kind of stuff that kept him saner. It was that positive feedback and sense of self-worth and importance that he got as a secondary bonus to the actual artwork. I don't think that just getting it out on paper did much for Charles or Max.

"There is a well-proven correlation between madness and genius. You run a high risk when you have the kind of brilliant talent like the Crumbs' given to you. It has great potential, but it's also a big danger. At the risk of sounding like some guy who lives in California and has smoked too much pot in his life, there's a sort of energy that people have, and it's a very dangerous thing if you get a high dose of this stuff like the Crumb family got. If you don't channel that energy in the right way, in a constructive outlet like Robert has managed to do, it can be *very* dangerous."

Crumb, an ultimately tragic film, peels a layer off of what might be considered by outsiders to be an ordinary American family and peers inside to find out what makes it tick. Dysfunctional families loom large in the public consciousness these days, partly because everyone is a member of one, and *Crumb* capitalized on that.

"What hit a chord in people is that they could relate to the Crumb family. As much as you read how shocking and disturbing his family is, I thought that was a very surprising reaction. One of the things that I admired about Robert is that he was pretty frank, and so was his whole family, and that kind of honesty and candor is just something not seen on screen in America in any kind of film. I think that's what shocked people.

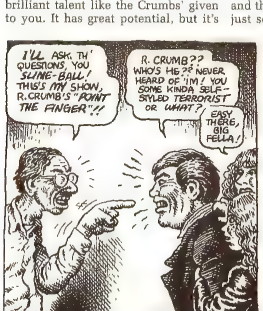
"If you think about it, in your own family, or in a friend's family, it's just not that rare…I know a million guys who are musicians or record collectors or people I happen to know from all walks of life and as you get to know them, you get to know their families. 'Oh, you've got an older brother.' 'Yeah, he has never had sex. He lives at home with his mother.' Or your mother's a drug addict or your brother's a heroin addict or your father was having sex with your sister. That stuff is *much* more common than people like to think. It's uncomfortable and disturbing. America is a very unhealthy society and a very hypocritical culture in the sense that it's not very honest and it's not very frank. That's what people responded to in this film. People being that honest is a very rare thing to see anywhere."

Given the naked truth that *Crumb* displays about Robert Crumb and his family, one wonders whether the artist likes the film. Is it even *possible* to like a film about yourself?

"The best I can do is quote something I just read about whether he liked the film or not," Zwigoff states. "He refused to do any publicity and he told me this before the film was even shot. He said, 'Don't ask me to do publicity

R. Crumb is known the world over for cutting edge comics like *Fritz the Cat*, which was "ruined" by Ralph Bakshi in an animated film.

All Comic Art: By & Copyright 1996 Robert Crumb


I'LL ASK TH' QUESTIONS YOU SLIME-BALL! THIS'S MY SHOW, R. CRUMB'S "POINT THE FINGER"!!
R. CRUMB?? WHO'S HE?? NEVER HEARD OF 'IM! YOU SOME KINDA SELF-STYLED TERRORIST OR WHAT?
EASY THERE, BIG FELLA!

"Nobody seemed to like the damn thing until it came out," Zwigoff says of *Crumb*. "Then, suddenly, it's the greatest film of the year."

ONE LOOK AT THE GOONY BIRDS THAT MAKE THIS MUSIC AND YOU'LL KNOW IMMEDIATELY WHY IT'S SO CRAPPY!
"WHEN I WAS ABOUT ELEVEN I STARTED DREPPING ABOUT MAKING A HIT RECORD."
I'D LIKE T'TAKE EVERY ONE A'THESE DIPSHITS AN' LINE 'EM UP AN' SHOOT 'EM !! FUCKIN' SCUM.
HA HA... YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS 'CAUSE GIRLS DON'T LIKE CARTOONISTS! HA HA HA
R. CRUMB GETS ROUGH

Design & Layout: Marc Bernardin

Crumb **delves into all the facets of R. Crumb's life, including his love—and hate—for different kinds of music.**

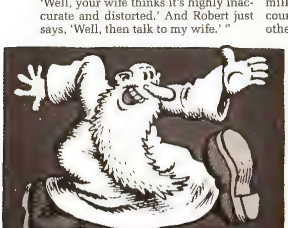
when this film's out. I just *don't* do publicity.' And I didn't expect him to, which was hard for us because when the film was getting successful, we had *incredible* offers of free publicity. *Rolling Stone* was going to do a cover and eight pages on the film, but it was pending on Robert doing at least a 10-minute phone interview as part of the story. He just said no, he wouldn't do it.

"He finally did an interview with a very small comics magazine. The writer kept pestering him to talk about the film and Robert kept saying no. Finally, the interviewer said, 'I just wanna know if you like it or not.' And Robert says, 'OK, you're asking me if I like the film. Here's how I feel about it. It's like somebody cuts off a piece of your arm, makes you eat it and says, "You like that? You like the way it tastes?" It's *me*. How am I gonna say if I like the film? It's me.' And the interviewer asks if he thinks it's accurate, and Robert says, 'Yeah, I think it's pretty accurate.' So, he left it at that. And the writer tried to goad him and says, 'Well, your wife thinks it's highly inaccurate and distorted.' And Robert just says, 'Well, then talk to my wife.' "

After years of following Robert Crumb around the country with a film crew and devoting a major part of his life to it, does Zwigoff like *Crumb*? "I like it a lot," the director says. "Nobody liked it when it was done. We showed it to like four different audiences of about 200 people each and with the exception of a few people, everybody *hated* it. Some people really loved the film and gave me the courage to stick with it, but most people, even in the making, were really discouraging. 'Why do you wanna look at his brother? Why do you want to have him on film? Look at the way he dresses. Look at the way his hair is. He doesn't make a good impression on screen.' Those people are really conventional in their thinking.

"Like I said, nobody seemed to like the damn thing until it came out, and then, suddenly, it's the greatest film of the year. Of course, to some degree, I resent that. But it's on 100 Top 10 lists and the 10 major critics called it the best film of the year and it has won a million of these stupid awards—of course, the Academy Award is a whole other story. It's unbelievable how crooked this thing is. They gave the Academy Award to the Chairwoman of the documentary committee. It's just a scandal. It's a very secret committee. Nobody can quite find out who is on it. None of them will give a comment to the press. In fact, they give misinformation to the press. They said that *Crumb* wasn't eligible, so the Oscar committee is not to blame for not nominating it. Since it was in the 1994 Toronto Film Festival, it wasn't eligible. That is not true. They just *lied*.

"The truth is that this committee watched the film the same year that *Hoop Dreams* [which also wasn't nominated for the Oscar] was eligible and turned it off after half an hour. They admitted that they turned it off without seeing even half of the film. People like Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert have been trying to make a public stink about it and say, 'Look, given all the awards this film has won, the National Society of Film Critics award; the LA Critics Circle, the NY Critics Circle and the



R. Crumb is the only one of three, artistically-talented brothers to lead a "normal" life. Why? "He got this constant feedback and money and girls and fame," explains Zwigoff.

Up next for Zwigoff is *Ghost World*, a film based on backup stories that appear in Dan Clowes' *Eightball*.

Eightball Cover. By & Copyright 1996 Daniel Clowes

LET'S SAVE A POPULAR HIT FROM THE HIPPIE ERA... ALL OF US I FOREVER ACID-HEADS EXPERIENCE LSD FLASHBACK WHEN WE HEAR THIS PSYCHEDELIC CLASSIC BY JIMI....
"PURPLE HAZE"
"PURPLE HAZE—WAS IN MY BRAIN—LATELY THINGS —DON'T SEEM THE SAME——."
"ACTIN' FUNNY, BUT DON'T KNOW WHY—— 'SCUSE ME WHILE I—KISS THE SKY——"
SMACK!
"PURPLE HAZE—ALL AROUND—DON'T KNOW IF I'M COMING UP OR DOWN——."

Selected Art: Courtesy Sony Pictures Classics

"He uses a lot of drawings and images that people could easily see as racist," Zwigoff offers, "but if you look at it carefully and think about it, something else is going on."

Chicago Film Critics are all nominating it for Best Film of the Year; it has won something like 12 out of 12 of every major award for documentary. You would think that maybe you could admit you were a little hasty in turning it off. At least look at the film before you vote on it this time. If you don't like it then, then fine. You don't have to vote for it.' And they wouldn't do that. They would not reconsider it. Fucking bastards."

From *Fritz the Cat* to *Mr. Natural*, Robert Crumb's comics have always been seen as a bit controversial, turning off critics and enraging conservatives all over the country. Zwigoff doesn't understand why.

"I don't think that Robert's comics are pornographic or racist, if you look at them carefully. Many people just have a knee-jerk reaction to them and they say, 'Oh, there's a couple having sex, therefore it's pornographic.' But if it's in some sort of serious, satiric context that makes you think about something in a new way, I would hardly call it something without any redeeming social value, or whatever the definition of pornography is these days. And I've never seen anything he has done that I think is racist. Again, he uses a lot of drawings and images that people could easily see as racist, but if you look at it carefully and think about it, something else is going on. And sexist? I don't know. As a man, it's pretty hard for me to make that call. At a certain level it's not, but at a certain level it is. Even if it's just Robert being a total sexist pig, it's making a comment on sexism at the same time. It all makes you think, and that elevates it past all that.

"Is it good for America? I think it is," continues Zwigoff. "It's certainly one of the reasons I made this film. It's really a waste of time to make a film that's not going to have any good influence on the audience. That's what it's all about, to try to do something that raises the consciousness of the audience. That's one of the reasons I like that film *Babe*. I was in a restaurant, and this couple was getting read the specials of the day by the waiter and they decided to order a vegetarian meal because they had just seen *Babe* and they didn't want to eat meat. I thought that was great, that a film could *change* people's actions and make them think about what they're doing and what's involved in making that decision. And it didn't do it in a preachy way. It raised people's consciousness.

"I don't know what my film did. It wasn't anything real direct like that but at least it makes you think about things, about different issues, family or art or America. I certainly didn't set out to do a message movie, but at the same time, movies should do something positive besides kill time for 90 minutes. They should give you something to think about."

Given the heat that Zwigoff has gathered since *Crumb*'s release, he's in the enviable position of being able to choose his next project carefully, as opposed to having to take the next thing that comes across his desk. So, what's next?

"I had been talking to Woody Allen's producer for the last couple of months. She had offered to hire me as director to do a documentary about him, but I turned it down because I couldn't get final cut on it. I just didn't think I could devote a couple years of my life to doing something and have somebody else be able to come in the editing room and start cutting it for me. It was very heartbreaking for me to do.

"Instead, I'm going to do a comedy feature called *Ghost World*, which is something I'm writing with Dan Clowes. He does a comic called *Eightball*, and in each of the last six issues, there has been a comic strip called *Ghost World*, about two 18-year-old girls. It's very realistic, the dialogue is right on the money and these characters are interesting and funny and smart. I thought it would make a great film. So, I pitched it down in Hollywood and I have three studios bidding on it. I hope it doesn't embarrass me. But it can't be any worse than most of the stuff I see."

Now that *Crumb* is out on video from Columbia TriStar, Terry Zwigoff hopes the documentary will reach a whole new audience, one that might see that documentaries aren't things to be feared. "I always compare *Crumb* to *Amadeus*. I had to be dragged to see that film because I thought it was going to be about classical music and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's biography, and I couldn't have cared less. But it was a great film, because it had these two great characters, Antonio Salieri and Mozart, and this rivalry between them and this whole investigation of envy. This one guy envying this other guy's talent so much; I felt like that to the Crumb family.

"I felt like Salieri to these guys who were so talented and yet only one of them managed to succeed as an artist. I wanted to find out why. I think that if *Crumb* had just been just a film about Robert Crumb, a conventional biography of him, I don't think it would have been very good."

COMICS scene

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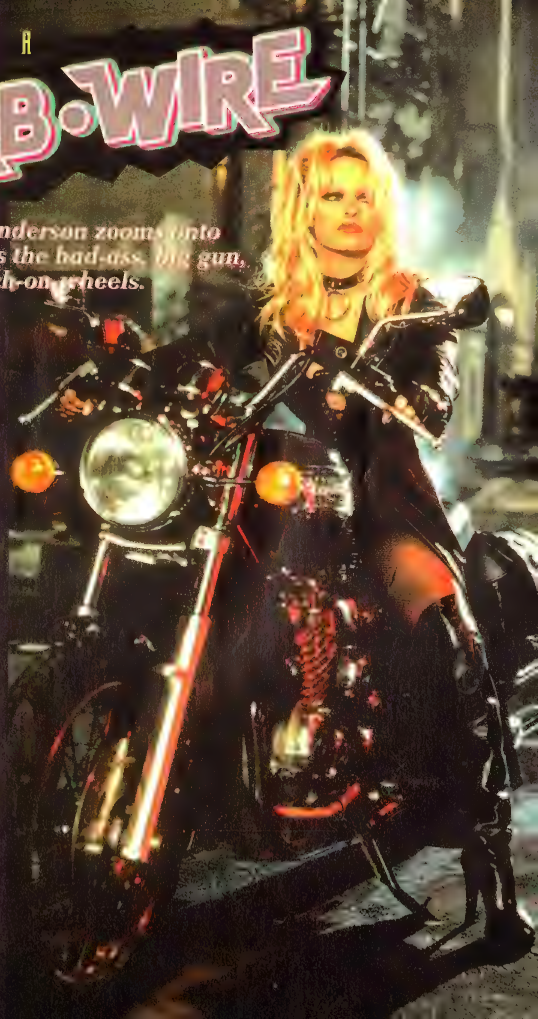
WALKING A BARB-WIRE

Pamela Anderson zooms into the screen as the bad-ass, big gun, bitch-on-wheels.

By MARC SHAPIRO



These days, *Barb Wire* producer Todd Moyer wears the look of a man who doesn't have a care in the world. That's only because *Barb Wire* is in the can and nothing else can go wrong.

"Pamela Anderson getting pregnant right in the middle of shooting and then losing the baby was a difficult situation," he concedes. "Having to replace director Adam Rifkin after nine days of filming [with David Hogan] was tough. It has been quite a wild ride."

It's a ride that has seen *Barb Wire*—who began her action-packed, "Bad Girl" odyssey in the pages of her own Dark Horse comic in 1994—make a super-quick jump to the big screen, with the "Don't Call Me Babe!" tagline intact.

"Turning comic books into movies is a particular sort of science," Moyer says of a process which rarely works well, if at all. "We [Hollywood] learned the hard way, with *Tank Girl*, that certain comic-book elements do not necessarily translate well to a wide, mainstream audience. So, with *Barb Wire*, we looked at the basic premise in the comics, saw what would work in a feature film and created a completely different story that, while containing the elements that made the comic unique, would be something suitable for the general public."

Barb Wire, directed by Hogan from a Chuck (*Hard Target*) Pfarrer script, focuses on the titular heroine—the owner of the Hammerhead Bar and Grill deep in the city of Steel Harbor, who also moonlights as a bounty hunter. She's as quick on the trigger as she is with a one-liner. Her mercenary ways are temporarily sidetracked when she's enticed by responsibility (and, of course, money) to help free a post-modern civil war resistance figure.

Anderson, of course, is the gun-toting, chopper-riding Barb Wire. Udo (*Johnny Mnemonic*) Kier plays Curly, the comic relief. Jack (*Dead at 21*) Noseworthy is Barb's blind brother Charlie. The film, being released by Gramercy Pictures, is produced by Moyer, Dark Horse honcho Mike Richardson and Brad Wyman.

Photo: Wren Maloney

"It wouldn't be believable to see Barb Wire beat up 10 huge guys," Moyer says. "We ended up going with a Steven Seagal kind of action."

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos

Barb Wire began taking tentative steps to the big screen late in 1994, when Moyer and Richardson, flush with their recent association with Polygram Pictures,

For *Barb Wire*, producer Todd Moyer "had to deliver Pamela Anderson, she could not have script or director approval and we had to get the film shot before she had to return to *Baywatch*."

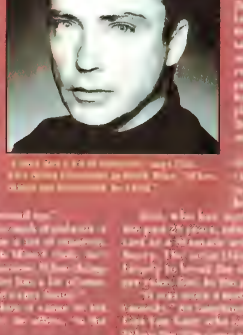
Photo: Wren Maloney

All Photos Copyright 1996 Gramercy Pictures.

Whatever you do, don't call her babe! Why? Big guns, a bad attitude, a name like Barb Wire and a brand-new feature film are all pretty good reasons.

were attempting to get a project off the ground. "We wanted to do a picture right away," Moyer recalls. "We weren't too particular at that point, although we knew we wanted to make something in the $8-10-million range. We were trying to figure out what to do when Brad Wyman came to me with a centerfold of Pam Anderson and said,

JUST FOR LAUGHS



Photos Courtesy The Gernett Company

'*This* is Barb Wire!' I told him that we were interested in making an A-movie, not a B-movie."

But Wyman persisted and came back with two money men willing to finance a pair of $4 million *Barb Wire* movies that would be shot back to back in Romania. Moyer continued to shake his head no at the notion of doing *Barb Wire* on the quick and dirty. But he did take the offer to Polygram, who returned with a counter offer.

"The head of Polygram said he would finance a $10 million *Barb Wire* movie out of the company's own budget. But, there were some conditions. I had to deliver Pamela Anderson, she could *not* have script or director approval and we had to get the film shot before she had to return to *Baywatch*."

Moyer then spent "a brutal Christmas and New Year's" attempting to negotiate a deal with Anderson. "Pamela's agent is the same guy who represents Jim Carrey," reflects Moyer of Gavin Palone, "and he's *very* tough. So, we had to come up with some creative dealmaking. The studio wasn't willing to pay Pamela what she asked for, but we came up with some extra money from the video game budget. We had Pamela come in and do some blue-screen work for the video game."

The movie was greenlighted in January 1995 on the strength of Anderson's participation. The only thing missing was the script. Moyer claims that they did, however, have a two-page outline and some definite ideas.

Photo: Wren Maloney

"We [Hollywood] learned the hard way, with *Tank Girl*, that certain comic-book elements do not necessarily translate well," offers Moyer.

According to Moyer, "*Barb Wire* has all the elements going for it."

Photo: Wren Maloney

"We saw some things that worked and that we definitely wanted to keep," the producer explains. "We loved the idea that Barb Wire was basically a neutral character who owned her allegiance to nobody, and that she owned a bar and rode a motorcycle. What we had to do was create a story that would work with those elements but would *not* seem merely like a comic book."

Pfarrer, who had already earned his action stripes on *Hard Target* and *Darkman*, was brought in to write the film and, through four drafts of the script with polishes from other writers, gave Moyer just what he wanted. "Chuck got the action elements down and added some new facets. It wouldn't be believable to see Barb Wire beat up 10 huge guys. We ended up going with a Steven Seagal kind of action, in which Barb Wire uses her smarts and talents in a natural kind of way."

Filming began early in '95 and immediately ran afoul of what Moyer says were "creative differences" that led to the dismissal of Rifkin and the hiring of Hogan as director. Anderson announcing she was pregnant and her subsequent miscarriage had the production walking a literal tightrope. "I was one of the first people to find out that she was pregnant, and I did not think it was the best idea to go public with it. But Pamela felt an obligation to the picture and to *Baywatch*, and she wanted to let everybody know what was happening. It was a tough time, but we got through it."

Moyer reports that development is continuing with two other Dark Horse comic-to-film projects. *Virus*, with a script by Pfarrer and Richard Jefferies, is currently being shopped to directors and actors. The once-promising *Green Hornet* has been dealt a potentially brutal blow, with George Clooney stepping out of the lead role as Britt Reid. Jason Scott Lee is still slated to play Kato, as he did for a brief bit in the Bruce Lee biopic *Dragon*. There is a script by Rich Wilkes and a take on the character, courtesy of

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF

Jack Noseworthy is of the opinion that somebody somewhere is cracking a joke.

"They're going to see" says the actor who plays Barb Wire's blind bartender Charlie. "I mean, here I am in a movie with Pamela Anderson, and I'm blind *and* I'm her brother! As far as I'm concerned, that's pretty sick!"

Noseworthy, who was last seen on VH1's short-lived science-fiction flavored chase show *Dead at 21*, has gone from chasing a time bomb in his head to, in *Barb Wire*, playing the sightless and ultimately doomed brother of the film's title heroine.

"Being blind was the *real* challenge in this part," he explains. "It's like learning a new skill and it's a kick. I trained with somebody from The Braille Institute and learned how to get around convincingly as a blind person. Of course, having to play blind opposite Pamela is no fun," he chuckles.

When Noseworthy landed the role in *Barb Wire*, he immediately raced to the source material, and promptly hit a stop sign. "I was told by the producers to forget the comic books and to concentrate on the script's depiction of my character. Which was just as well, because I'm not a big comic book fan and never really read comics.

"Which is also just as well because we're not playing those people like comic book characters," he continues. "Charlie and these other people are really fleshed out. All the trappings of this film are very over the top and comic book-like and so, by having these characters totally straight, we're putting a real twist on the film."

Noseworthy's memories of *Dead at 21* are of a series "that was very physical. We did a lot of location stuff outdoors, and it seemed like every time I turned around I was running from the bad guys or doing some heavy action stuff. I thought it was a really good premise and I'm disappointed that it didn't last longer than one season. The show's budget was a major consideration in it being cancelled."

The actor points out that a recently completed mother-sister conversation between Barb and Charlie is a key point for him. "It's a big moment as the two finally sit down and discuss where we're at in our lives and where we're going."

But where Jack Noseworthy is going this day is to the promised land. "I'm about to get hanged. It's this great shot with the Sun coming down on my body hanging. It's a great moment in the film. I can't wait to die."

—Marc Shapiro

Moyer couldn't have found a hotter actress to be his Barb Wire, as Anderson's popularity is at an all-time high.

Dark Horse's Richardson, that according to Moyer "will not make the Green Hornet seem like a *rip-off* of Batman.

"Britt Reid is like the Chow Yun-Fat character [Tequila] from the John Woo film *Hard Boiled*. He's balls to the wall: leaping across cables and shooting guns. Kato is a much stronger character than before, one well versed in the mystical Chinese arts. There will be more of an East-West duality between Kato and the Green Hornet. There will definitely be a Hong Kong action influence in this movie."

Todd Moyer is well aware of the current popularity of so-called Bad Girl comic book heroines, and isn't sure whether it will be a short-lived trend or not. But he does feel that *Barb Wire* is on the right track. "*Barb Wire* has all the elements going for it. It's bigger than life. It has action. It pretty much has it all."

COSTUME CHANGES

I should come at the costumes from the standpoint of [creating the costumes for] Anderson. Pamela's the one who has to wear them. She's the one who has to look sexy in them. She's the one who has to look like a million bucks in them. And [costume designer] Mary [E. Vogt] is the one who would say, "Mary, I don't care if you like the costume, Pamela doesn't look sexy in it. Pamela's not going to wear it."

And [director] David [Hogan] and I would go, "Mary, I don't care if you like the costume, Pamela doesn't look sexy in it. Pamela's not going to wear it." So Mary would go back to the drawing board and come back with something else. And we'd

Dark Cul

Art: Joe Jusko

With Lady Death & Evil Ernie, Brian Pulido sends the world into Chaos.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Chaos Comics founder Brian Pulido is embarking on an odyssey, one no less strange in its own way than that of his most popular creation, Lady Death. In the past three years, Pulido's company has risen to become one of the top independent publishers in comics. Though Chaos' original success was established largely on the popularity of *Evil Ernie*, a curvacious new character soon seized the spotlight and hasn't budged.

With the blood of angels and demons coursing through her veins, Lady Death has starred in a series of storylines, each more popular than the last. At the conclusion of her most recent, *Lady Death: Between Heaven and Hell*, Lady Death quite literally defeated Lucifer himself, which left her severely depleted in terms of power. The new story, *Lady Death: The Odyssey*, finds her adrift in a universe of realms called The Unknown, where all theologies clash.

"An intervening character, a guardian angel called Vandala, realizes that Lady Death is at a very weak point in her life," says Pulido. "Vandala needs Lady Death for her own purpose, and decides to send her to different realms to ready her for something in the future."

Pulido explains that the realms she is sent to in the four-issue mini-series are very different from anything readers have seen before, yet somehow relate to the past. "The first realm she goes to is a frozen tundra that was once a jungle, where she meets a fallen angel named Agony. We dubbed that our 'Lady Death, Queen of the Jungle' issue," he says. "In the second issue, she goes to a desert realm and fights these twin mystical druids, Macabre and Malady. In the third, of all people she goes up against the Hindu goddess of Death and Chaos, whose name is Kali. This goddess is a cannibal who actually wants to eat Lady Death. And

All Art: Courtesy Chaos Comics

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos

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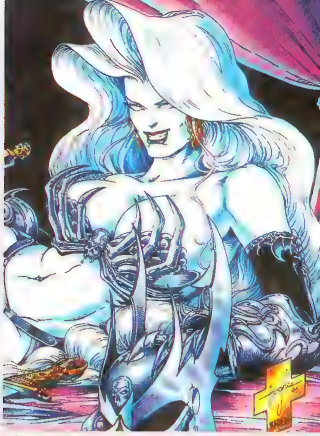
Photo: By & Copyright 1996 Albert Ortega

Spreading dark pop culture across the globe is the mission of Brian Pulido and his Chaos Comics team.



"The success of *Lady Death* really took us by surprise," admits Pulido, whose busty Bad Girl has helped pave the way for a whole comic-book genre.

in the fourth issue, which for longtime readers will be especially interesting, she finds home, and it appears that the story comes to a close. But does it really?"

Lady Death: The Odyssey finds the character delving more deeply into many areas of mythology as the epic series continues onward. "The giant story that I will tell over the course of the next eight years on *Lady Death* has to do with our normal understanding of Heaven and Hell, but we are definitely going out into the world of little-seen mythology," reveals Pulido. "Something big is going on. Each of these stories stands on its own, but they will form a much larger tapestry years from now."

Returning for the mini-series is original *Lady Death* artist Steven Hughes, along with colorist Jason Jensen. "We start from a full script, and I typically take a whack at the first design of most characters," says Pulido. "Then, Steve and I meet in person. He will have read the script and seen some of the characters. I actually end up acting out a lot of the stuff, because I'll be equally involved with 'camera' position and lighting. Although the script conveys where the characters are emotionally, our most successful collaborations are usually when I'm acting a lot of our stuff out, so you can pick up the subtleties. Jason is usually in on it too, so that we're all working from the same creative center; all aiming for the same end result."

The horrific roots of Evil Ernie are soon to be unearthed in a pair of chilling mini-series.

Pulido brings a cinematic approach to *Lady Death*, as he does all of his comics work. "My background is in film. I was an old NYU Film School grad, and worked in the film business," Pulido relates. "My scripts will talk about where the character is at emotionally, but I'm always starting from the camera angle, the lighting, the emotionality of the characters. It's pretty obsessive stuff!"

It will take several more years to unfold the entire *Lady Death* epic, but Pulido says he has the saga completely planned out. "I have a lot of notes, and I know exactly where we're headed, trust me. It has been plotted out with signposts for the next eight years."

When they were created, Pulido admits he had no idea that either Evil Ernie or Lady Death would last beyond one story each, and he didn't widen the range of either until they appeared to be successful. "To be honest, I figured I would tell Evil Ernie's one story and Lady Death's one story, and that would be the end of it. But, as it became successful and people

"We've decided that it's time to go back to the raw, pure, horific Evil Ernie," notes Pulido.

Selected Art: Steven Hughes/Colors: Jason Jensen

"It's a matter of getting the right deal for handling the property," Pulido explains of his philosophy for retaining control when Lady Death moves to the big screen.

wanted to read more about it, I said, 'OK, this is different. We're looking at these comics series as a series of movies, but let's increase the scope and sweep, let's look at the life—Evil Ernie's life, Lady Death's entire life.' It immediately changed the magnitude of the whole thing."

Not surprisingly, Hollywood has shown interest in a Lady Death film, but Pulido says Chaos is going to make sure it's done their way. "Chaos Comics, as opposed to partitioning off the rights to our individual properties for options, has taken a different path. Chaos will accrue a degree of power and credibility doing what we're doing, and then take a longer view, much like Dark Horse Entertainment—they are involved in their motion picture and major media productions.

"In the beginning, we would get offers for options, etc. If I had a nickel for every offer we got, I could take everyone I know to dinner! But, we're trying to look at the bigger picture. We are directly involved in the production of the motion picture, because that's chiefly my background. Right now, I'm happy to say that this year will be very telling, because our offers are more along the lines of Chaos as a producing entity, along with established motion picture production companies. It's Chaos *Communications*, just like Dark Horse *Entertainment*. By the end of the year, we should have some pretty good announcements. It's easy to take the first deal or the first 10 deals—it's a matter of getting the right deal for handling the property. It's how Todd McFarlane handles everything he does. I'm the same way. I keep my hands on the whole darned thing, making sure it's true to the vision."

For more than 50 years of comics history, almost no title with a strong female lead character has become a major sales success, but the recent wave of Bad Girl books, led in part by Lady Death, is proving that powerful females can generate powerful sales. "The success of *Lady Death* really took us by surprise," admits Pulido. "When we did the first *Lady Death*, we just prayed that people would halfway like it, especially the first issue, which started with such a little kernel of the story. It's about this teenage girl in medieval times, and it doesn't start getting that scope and grandeur until the third issue. We just hoped to squeak a living from it, and when it started taking off and snowballing, I started getting phone calls. Beau Smith said, 'You guys have managed to do something that hasn't been done before!' It's a gift. On a day-to-day basis, our job is to try to tell a story, and everything that comes after that is just a wonderful benefit. It's phenomenal!"

Pulido is unimpressed by most of the Bad Girl comics that have come out in the wake of *Lady Death* because they appear to be attempts to cash in on a craze. "Anytime something new becomes hot, many people are out to imitate it," he maintains. "They're pandering. These are not really the stories they want to tell; they feel compelled to repeat what other people are doing. It happened a couple of years ago with the superhero universes that were popping up all over the place, and I predict that next year it's going to happen with crossovers. But I would say that the advent of all of these extra female-based titles—I don't think the industry can sustain all of them, so I think there will be a little bit of a shakeout. Whoever's the most passionate and committed about their stories will remain.

"As I see certain companies jumping on the bandwagon, it's sad. This is a wonderful industry, where people are being rewarded for being passionate about their storytelling. For example, Jeff Smith's *Bone* or Drew Hayes' *Poison Elves* or Garth Ennis' *Preacher*. These are very different comics, but they're from people very passionate about telling stories. I challenge those people jumping on bandwagons and trying to cash in to tell the story that they were meant to tell. Don't pander; don't be artificial about the story they want to tell. I have a negative view of everybody jumping on the bandwagon. I say go out and make your own sandbox."

While Pulido would be the last to encourage newcomers to jump on his bandwagon, he will be adding a passenger himself. Lady Death's vampiric arch-enemy will also be starring in her own mini-series this summer, with a 16-page preview, *Purgatori: Prelude* out this spring. The series, *Purgatori: The Vampires Myth*, spans the history of vampires from ancient times to the present, and will be written by Pulido with art by fan favorite Jim (*Catwoman*) Balent.

"It's the most astounding artwork I've ever seen out of him," enthuses Pulido. "I'm partial, because I've always loved Jim's work. Jim and I met about five years ago when we were starting out in independent comics, six

All Lady Death, Evil Ernie & Purgatori Characters & Art Copyright 1996 Chaos Comics

months before the black-and-white *Evil Ernie* came out, and Jim was doing a comic called *From the Darkness*. We connected as people, and I've enjoyed his work since. About this time last year, I pitched him the idea of doing the *Purgatori* story for my character, and when he said yes, we sat down and pow-wowed, took a look at our schedules, and I asked him what he liked to draw. We incubated the ideas, did a lot of research, and we are neck-deep in the *Purgatori* mini-series. It's easily the finest, most impassioned work I've ever seen out of Jim Balent, and this is a guy with considerable talent. We get the pages in and my jaw drops. It is heavy stuff!"

Purgatori: The Vampires Myth is a dark tale involving the role of vampires throughout ancient history. "This is a bloodthirsty tale of blasphemy. It's the most research I've ever put into a story, but it's a lot of fun," explains Pulido. "It goes back to the heart of the Egyptian Empire and introduces all of these different clans of vampires. Purgatori is a real catalyst. The question is, what did she do to all of these people to get them to want her dead so bad? I must say, Purgatori is a profound bitch!"

Fans are going to be learning *much* more about Purgatori during the mini-series, he notes.

"Purgatori is a character who, through circumstances that we'll reveal in the series, became a vampire during the height of the great Egyptian Empire. Through thick and thin, Purgatori actually has a profound joy for living life. The vampires that are around her seek to end her existence. Although they've led this un-life for 4,000 years—some are so ancient and also so empowered it's unbelievable—they realize that they're life-takers, not life-givers."

There are ecological elements to the mini-series, though a love story lies at the heart of the entire tale. "We'll see a lot of sub-text about the state of civilization," says Pulido. "We live in a fairly polluted world, and the last time Purgatori breathed the air on Earth, it was clean and pure. That little string that's running through the series will be manifested in a mysterious character that we call the Celt, a vampire who was 2,000 years old at the time of ancient Egypt. He's very bestial and doesn't believe in civilization. By the end of the series, with Purgatori as our conduit, we will learn that there are many different clans of vampires of different age groups and different agendas, and we will have a tragic tale of love lost. Readers will be freaked out when they learn who Purgatori loves, because it's very interesting."

***Lady Death: The Odyssey* will take its title character through a universe of realms called The Unknown.**

Pulido's other creation has just finished his most recent mini-series, *Evil Ernie: Straight to Hell*, and is proceeding along a more horrific route. "I got an interesting challenge from a friend of mine who has been reading *Evil Ernie* since the beginning," reveals Pulido. "He felt that the current mini-series was a little glossy, and Ernie became a little warmer and cuddlier. I don't think that's really the case, but I understood what he wanted. He wanted to go back to *Evil Ernie's* horrific roots. He wanted a sense of the bogeyman again.

"The next Evil Ernie story is called *Pieces of Me*, and it goes back into Ernest Fairchild's history, and speaks about a very specific part of his history, which was the night before he was institutionalized. He murdered his parents, then he went down the street and systematically murdered everyone on the street—or so it appeared. He never murdered the children on the street, and there's a tale to be told in there. It's purely about horror, and it's about abuse in its different forms. We've decided that it's time to go back to the raw, pure, horrific *Evil Ernie*. It's definitely his darkest story to date."

Pulido points out that he has big, ambitious plans for Chaos over the next five years, plans that extend beyond comics. "We have our spidery tendrils in what I call dark media, or dark pop culture," says Pulido. "I would like to be producing four comic books a month consistently, all of a dark nature. I would like to have some of the finest writers of dark material to consider Chaos Comics their home. I would like our influence to be felt in major motion pictures, in games

Art: Jim Balent/Colors: Jason Jensen

Pulido describes *Purgatori: The Vampires Myth* as "a bloodthirsty tale of blasphemy."

and I would like Chaos to grow from being a comic book company into a lifestyle. I want people who read Chaos Comics to also count on Chaos Comics for clothing, for jewelry and for all forms of lifestyle-based stuff. To put it mildly, we would like to be the Harley-Davidson of comics!"

Though the comics industry is experiencing a downturn at the moment, Pulido says Chaos is well-prepared to ride out the current slump. "I think this recession is going to continue, but we're weathering this storm quite well," says Pulido. "How have we weathered this storm and even excelled during this time? By staying true to the vision and telling the story passionately and honestly."

Despite gimmicks and glitz, Brian Pulido says Chaos Comics will remain true to the most important element of comic books. "Our investment remains in telling the best possible story. You can slap all kinds of funny, wacky covers on things, and we've certainly done our fair share of that—we've almost been on the vanguard of strange covers—but if the comic inside isn't good, you're going to lose your readership.

"Current Chaos readers know that the continuity is tight, the stories are heading somewhere, and that we will always do our best to tell honest, passionate stories. When we try to turn things into marketing events, or we sacrifice the quality and content of the stories, we could lose the reader. We come from the support of comics retailers and readers. And because of the support of the fans and comic shop owners, we get to live our dreams!"

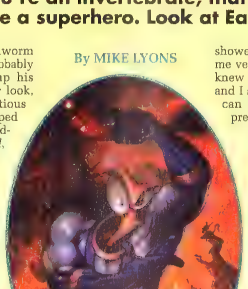
SPINELESS HERO

Just because you're an invertebrate, that doesn't mean you can't be a superhero. Look at Earthworm Jim!

By MIKE LYONS

Grrrooovy!" That's Earthworm Jim's catch phrase and probably the best way to sum up his show. With its off-kilter look, sharp writing and infectious theme song, *Earthworm Jim* has tapped into the same skewed vein that's feeding audiences *Beavis and Butt-head*, *The Simpsons* and *Animaniacs*. As part of the WB Network's Saturday morning cartoon line-up, Universal's *Earthworm Jim* has also moved beyond cult status, pulling in some galactic ratings.

What exactly is the appeal of a giant, superhero worm? "He has this lack of understanding of the world that makes him kind of child-like, but not childish," says *Earthworm Jim* writer and story editor Doug Langdale. "It gives him an interesting quality. He's very enthusiastic about things around him, without understanding them. There's something I find very appealing about all of that. I don't know if it appeals to actual children, but since I pretty much think like a child, it appeals to me."



***Earthworm Jim* the cartoon sprang from *Earthworm Jim* the video game, in which Jim took on even more exaggeratedly heroic proportions.**

Earthworm Jim actually has roots in the video game industry. "We had a great relationship with Playmates Toys. We did a show with them called *Exo-Squad*," says Jonathan Rosenthal, director of development at the Universal Cartoon Studio. "The people at Playmates asked Jeff (Segal, president of Universal Cartoon Studio) and myself to check out a property from their new interactive game division, Shiny Entertainment."

That new property was a game called *Earthworm Jim*. Rosenthal and Segal met with company representatives and the creator of *Earthworm Jim*, Doug TenNapel. It only took one look at TenNapel's sketches to convince the "Universal boys" that *Jim* would be fertile ground for animation. "It was apparent from the get-go that this was something we wanted to do," says Rosenthal. "It was perfect for our sensibilities."

When Langdale was brought on board to write, he had a similar reaction. "Some of the guys at Universal showed me the artwork and pitched it to me verbally and I felt like I immediately knew the show," he says. "I looked at it and I said, 'All right. I *know* this show. I can write a script right now.' And, I pretty much did."

You see, it seems that in a far-off galaxy, Queen Slug-For-A-Butt, (the most self-explanatory name of any cartoon character), enlisted the evil scientist, Professor Monkey-For-A-Head, (the second most self-explanatory) to build a super, cyber space suit that would allow anyone who wears it to have phenomenal powers. Unfortunately, the suit fell to Earth, where it landed on a mild-mannered earthworm, who was instantly transformed into (fanfare)...well, you get the drift.

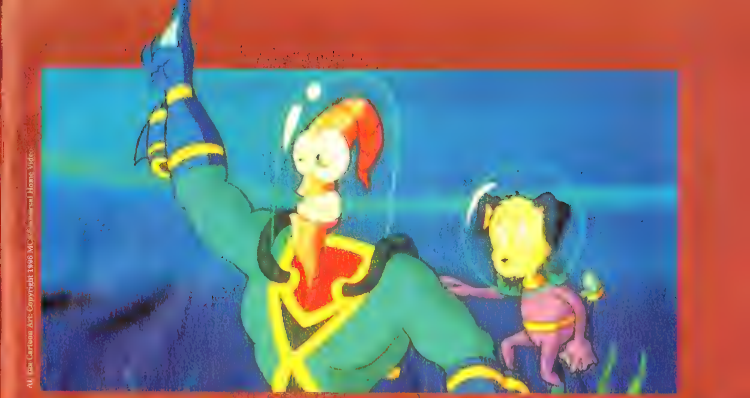
"Actually, Jim doesn't have any super powers, it just made him more intelligent," Rosenthal clarifies. "It gave him eyes and a mouth, no nose, and he's able to control the suit. He, as a worm, has no super powers, only four hyper-intelligent brains. Well, whether they're hyper-intelligent or not is open for debate."

In fact, many say that Jim's intelligence resides in his sidekick, Peter Puppy. A meek, cartoony-looking dog, Peter would be the perfect sidekick if it weren't for the fact that he transforms into a seething monster whenever he gets upset. According to Rosenthal, Peter has had a major face-lift from his video game counterpart. "In the game, he's simply a menace. We took that and developed him. A lot more personality came into it than is already communicated in the game."

Langdale enjoys the dynamic at work between Jim and his temperamental sidekick. "The central thing with Jim is that he basically was a regular worm until maybe a year ago, so he's not stupid, he's very intelligent, but he doesn't have a real understanding of how the world works. He has a tendency to say things because they

Design & Layout: Jake Rowe

Game Art: Courtesy Sega



All Earthworm Jim Copyright 1995 Virgin Interactive Entertainment (Europe) Ltd.

He has this lack of understanding of the world that makes him kind of child-like, but not childish, says *Earthworm Jim* writer and story editor Doug Langdale.

Jim's love interest in the series is, um, you know, Princess What's-Her-Name.

The dastardly Prof. Monkey-For-A-Head and Psy-Crow will do anything to get back the cyber suit that gives Jim his powers.

Plenty snappy in this cartoon universe and the more [illegible] of the duo, but what a temper this guy's got!

sound like the kind of thing he ought to be saying, but they don't make any sense. Peter is a little bit more like a real person. It's nice the way that they work together, because they really aren't these simple, two-dimensional characters. I like that it's not that one's the dumb one and one's the smart one. They are a little bit more like real people, in a way."

Jim and Peter may be reflective of human personalities, but a show like *Earthworm Jim* is only as good as its worst villains, and the show definitely has some of the best, uh, worst. There is, of course, Queen Slug-For-A-Butt and Professor Monkey-For-A-Head, who just want their suit back. This, it seems, has become the obsession of the entire roster of villains, along with world domination, as evidenced by Bob, the killer goldfish, and his sidekick, "henchcat" Number Four. "They're all numbered, his 'henchcats,' " Rosenthal explains. "Numbers One, Two and Three are in Kitty Heaven, where, as Doug puts it, 'Milk flows like water and all the mice are slow.' "

"I think there was a lot of stuff that if we had more time to think about it, we would have said, 'No, we're crazy; someone stop us,' " admits Langdale.

"He pretty much wants to rule the universe," says Langdale of Bob. "The main problem he has is that although he is fantastically intelligent and very determined, he's just a fish and doesn't have any special abilities of his own. Unfortunately, most of his soldiers consist of other fish."

Along with Bob, there is Evil the Cat (these guys are big fans of self-explanatory names)—a small, white feline, with pointy ears and sharp, jutting fangs—who is ably assisted by his "henchrat." There's also Psy-Crow, a giant black crow dressed in a giant yellow space suit. As Rosenthal explains, this villain has even another ulterior motive for his nastiness, "Psy-Crow wants to get the suit, sure, but he would also like to eat Jim. After all, he is a crow and Jim's the biggest worm he has ever seen!"

This wonderfully eccentric cast all sprang from the video game, but there have been some changes made for the show. For example, Jim's sidekick in the game, Snot—a mysterious gurgling mass residing in Jim's backpack that always manages to say something brilliant—has not had that large a role on the show. "I would say there's more expansion than change," says Rosenthal. "In the video game, there's really only so much that you can know or see about any of the characters. The show further develops the personalities."

The responsibility for fleshing out these characters fell on Langdale, who says that transforming the game from the video to the TV screen was a surprisingly easy experience. "The game has real characters," he says, "unlike a lot of games, so the transition was pretty smooth. Also, the animation in the game is more character driven than it usually is in video games."

For story ideas, Langdale would meet with TenNapel and kick around ideas for plots, situations and gags. This has resulted in some pretty "out-there" storylines, including one in which Jim accidentally falls into a color copier and one of the copies of him comes out mangled, gets doused in nuclear waste and turns into Earthworm Jim's Evil Twin. In another, Jim scours the universe to find an egg-beater that he borrowed from his next-door neighbor. Langdale notes that Universal has given him a tremendous amount of freedom when crafting the episodes, "They pretty much let me do what I want to do. If I want to do an episode about snowglobes, everyone would say, 'Great, OK.' "

Langdale doesn't exactly know where such ideas came from, but does think that time played a large role. "I had to turn out a script every week, so there was this really insane schedule. It gave us a lot of freedom. I think there was a lot of stuff that if we had more time to think about it, we would have said, 'No, we're crazy; someone stop us.' But we didn't, because it was like, 'Hey, we need a script by Friday!' "

In addition to the writing, the voices behind *Earthworm Jim* have helped flesh out the characters, and when it comes to voice actors, this show has what could definitely be called an all-star cast. Dan Castellaneta, the voice of Homer Simpson, voices Earthworm Jim; the multitalented Jim Cummings is the voice of not only Bob, but also Henchcat Number Four and Psy-Crow; Edward Hibbert, who plays the snooty restaurant critic on *Frasier*, lends his voice to Evil the Cat; and John Kassir, who cackles as the Crypt Keeper on HBO's *Tales From the Crypt* is Evil's sidekick, Henchrat. The cast also includes Andrea Martin as Queen Slug-For-A-Butt, Kath Soucie as Jim's love interest of sorts, Princess What's-Her-Name, Jeff Bennett is both the Narrator and Peter, and Charles Adler as Professor Monkey-For-A-Head. The show has also

The Earthworm Jim rogues gallery: Queen Slug-For-A-Butt, Bench Rat, Evil the Cat, Prof. Monkey-For-A-Head, Psy-Crow and Bob (with #4).

had guest voices, including Ben Stein (the monotone teacher in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*), who provided the deadpan voice of the Nameless Beast.

Langdale says that this cast had an immediate effect on their animated counterparts, especially in the case of Bob. "Originally, he was the least defined of the villains. He just sort of had the generic villain dialogue. We had a bunch of people come in and do different voices and then Jim Cummings came in and did Orson Welles and it was fantastic. But, we're on right after *Pinky and the Brain* and the Brain is Orson Welles. Brain is the young Orson Welles and Jim was doing the older, wheezy Orson Welles. It was great, but we really could not do it. So, then he did this Southern preacher voice and at first, I was saying, 'Oh God, I've heard this about a million times.' But it actually worked out well, because we didn't do a bunch of preacher jokes, we just took that as the character and wrote the dialogue that way. It worked so naturally with the overblown villain dialogue."

He also says that Hibbert has had a tremendous influence over Evil the Cat. "He played it a lot less over the top than we had originally planned. He actually sounds more like a believable person and had a bit of a lisp, which works so great with those giant, jutting teeth. He has this languid, cat-like quality to his delivery that works out really nicely."

The cast has had such a tremendous influence on the writing that Langdale now finds himself tailoring certain lines for the actors, especially in the case of Castellaneta. "He's a great screamer," the writer offers. "You just want to have him scream about every three minutes." The ad-libbing that occurs during the recording sessions has also fueled the writing. "Jeff Bennett is unbelievable," says Langdale. "He's just hysterically funny. He would do a voice, just joking around in the recording and we would say, 'OK, we'll have to use that in our next script.'"

All of this has added up to a show that audiences just cannot get enough of, which of course has given *Earthworm Jim* a healthy life beyond the screen. In addition to the video game, Marvel Comics adaptation and action figures, there are also plans for a promotional tie-in with Taco Bell and for costumed *Earthworm Jim* characters to begin roaming the Universal theme parks in California and Florida. Langdale notes that such product tie-ins have had an impact on the show, especially the "Evil Twin" episode. "It was kind of weird; we were compelled to do the episode, because the toy company wanted to create an Evil Jim toy." There are even plans to bring the character to the large screen with *Earthworm Jim: The Motion Picture*. The film, currently in the early development stages, is still trying to find its medium, as the producers are deciding between traditional cel animation, computer-generated imagery, or, believe it or not, live action!

The stellar voice cast of *Earthworm Jim* features Jim Cummings as Psy-Crow and even CasteHanella as Jim.

For now, however, *Earthworm Jim* is still a wonder of the small screen and may be that for some time to come, since the WB Network has renewed it for a second season. Langdale says that he's tried to gauge audience reaction in shaping his ideas for season number two. "I cruise around the Internet and many people were asking, 'What the hell is the deal with Peter? Why is he a talking dog?' So, we're doing an episode where we find out a little bit more about that. He violates the great taboo of dogs, in that he goes too near a vacuum cleaner that's running and gets sucked through a dimensional vortex. There's one where Evil Jim comes back and creates evil duplicates of every character on the show. He winds up making evil doubles of the villains, who are, of course, good duplicates. It turns into this whole, gigantic, complicated thing that will probably make all the animators hate me."

This relationship with the animators will probably not improve, as Langdale would also like to experiment with different styles of animation next season. "I really want to do an episode where the budget runs out for a little while and everything turns into a pencil test," jokes Doug Langdale. This type of giddy attitude has been infectious for everyone involved with *Earthworm Jim*, according to Jonathan Rosenthal, who having been involved with the show since its inception, sums up the whole experience by saying, "I would like to use a word that's better on the SATs than 'fun,' but I don't know that I really can."

In this case, perhaps a better word choice would be, "Grrroovy!"

James and the Giant PEACH

"My hope is that we connect with the movie's intended audience—kids," says director Henry Selick.

From Roald Dahl's beloved children's book *James and the Giant Peach* comes a new motion picture featuring a boy named James, some insects and one gigantic peach.

Henry Selick fashions an animated fantasy from Roald Dahl's classic fable.

By KYLE COUNTS

Had things turned out differently, author Roald Dahl's first children's book might have been called *James and the Giant Cherry*. The garden in Dahl's English home was graced by a majestic cherry tree whose fruit was consumed by ravenous blackbirds before he had the chance to taste a single piece. That gave him an idea: What if the cherries failed to stop growing? What if one of them swelled to such gargantuan size that a family of oversized insects could inhabit it?

So was born the "seed" of Dahl's beloved fantasy-adventure *James and the Giant Peach*, still a perennial best-seller worldwide. (Why a peach rather than, say, an apple? Because, as he would later say, "it's pretty, it's big, and it's squishy.") Now, 35 years after its publication, Disney is bringing this classic tale—about an orphan and some very unusual shipmates who take a transcontinental journey inside a giant peach—to theaters. Utilizing many of the same creative talents behind *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (STARLOG #197), including director Henry Selick, the movie is a groundbreaking mix of live-action, stop-motion animation, computer-generated imagery, optical compositing and digital effects.

According to Dahl's daughter, Lucy (who has chronicled the film's making in *James and the Giant Peach: The Book and Movie Scrapbook*), the enduring appeal of *James* is directly related to her father's unique worldview. "My father wrote for children, listened to the critics of children and hoped that adults would hear what he had to say. He spoke the truth. He was able to draw a fine line between humor and tragedy. So few people know how to write about it, much less talk about it. Probably the best way to describe it would be, if a man slips on a banana skin, it's funny; if he slips on a banana skin and breaks his back, it's not funny. There's a line separating the two. In all

Photo: Andy Lawless

James himself is given voice by Paul Terry. "I knew he would be able to put up with a lot of hard work," notes Selick.

Photo: Ro Henry

Richard Dreyfuss voices Centipede, one of James' insect companions.

Photo: Kelvin James

Photo: Andy Lawless Design & Layout: Luis Kasseo

Photo: Bo Henry

The Ladybug's voice is performed by *Frasier*'s Jane Leeves, who had to age her voice 30 years and put on 50 pounds.

For Selick, the most exciting casting was Susan Sarandon as Miss Spider. "She's one of our country's greatest actors," he maintains.

his work, Dad carefully walks that line. His work is exciting and funny and scary, all at the same time."

There's an "element of identification" in her father's work as well, Dahl observes. "All children can identify with being bullied by one or more adults in their life. And *every* child is afraid that his parents are going to die at some time or another. So what my father does is feed on the element of truth, lifting the tragedy up with humor."

Over the years, various studios approached Roald Dahl (who died in 1990) about filming *James*, with no success. "There were many people who wanted to adapt it over the years, but we didn't feel that anyone could, at least not in the way it needed to be made," explains his daughter. "How could they keep the magic intact? When we saw *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, we knew that was it. Tim Burton [producer of *James*] had always loved *James and the Giant Peach*, and it was a passion of Henry's as well. They approached my stepmother and she said no, until they showed us *Nightmare* and we saw the wonderful stop-motion work. That's what convinced us."

The only contractual agreement the Dahl family (his son, daughters and widow) had with Disney was final script approval. "The script was very important, and Karey Kirkpatrick [*The Rescuers Down Under*] did a marvelous job adapting my father's book. [While final writing credits have yet to be determined, Jonathan Roberts and Steve Bloom also worked on the adaptation.] Legally that was it, as far as the family's involvement, but what was nice was that Henry kept us all involved. He would come to England with character designs [by children's illustrator Lane Smith], to ask us what we thought about them. So it became a big, open-hearted family thing rather than a corporate, money-making venture."

Photo: Kelvin Jones

Armature designer Tom St. Amand's team, including Daniel Campbell, pictured, built hundreds of metal skeletons for the film's animated characters.

Located south of the Market area near downtown San Francisco, Skellington Studios [where *Nightmare* was produced] is housed in a large, nondescript building that looks much the same as the area's other warehouse-size structures. Inside, *James and the Giant Peach* is in its final week of filming. Everyone seems glad that the end is finally in sight, especially considering the fact that the movie has consumed close to two years (in some cases, more) of their lives. As character department manager Bonita DeCarlo puts it, "We're all pretty tired. At the end of one of these shows, you just want to go home and sleep for a month. And that's exactly what I plan to do."

What was once a massive day-to-day operation—up to 26 stages were in simultaneous use at the production's height, with 130 crew members toiling around the clock to turn out the film's 45 minutes of stop-motion animation—has now been severely scaled back, though there's still plenty of activity in the building, as there are a few scenes still to be finished.

"We're in the last few days of shooting, at which time we'll have another screening for Disney [top brass],"

James and the Giant Peach Photos: Copyright 1996 The Walt Disney Company

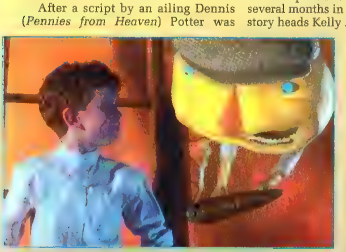
Photo: Bo Henry

Photo: Kelvin Jones

Dahl's family is very happy with the work of the artists, like sculpter Jerome Ranft, who have helped bring *James and the Giant Peach* to life.

explains visual FX producer Nancy St. John, who handled similar chores for *Babe*. "Then, we'll officially be in post-production, though we in fact have been in post for almost a year now. When we started production in January [1995], we also hired on our two post-production facilities, Sony Pictures Image Works and Buena Vista Visual Effects. As shots were coming off the stages, I was firing them off to both houses."

After a script by an ailing Dennis (*Pennies from Heaven*) Potter was deemed unsuitable by the studio, Selick began work in February 1994 on a new version with *The Lion King*'s Roberts, while a small team of pre-production personnel worked to solve the problems associated with bringing the book to the screen. (The film's second act was designed to be total stop-motion animation, with acts one and three planned as live action.) When that script failed to fly, Selick spent several months in Los Angeles with co-story heads Kelly Asbury and Joe Ranft to flesh out the action and dialogue while continuing to refine the material with Roberts, with what Selick terms "occasional input" from Disney execs.



The live-action sequences were carefully designed to complement the animation. "We didn't want a stark contrast," says live-action production designer Harley Jessup.

Kirkpatrick came on board to pen a rewrite of Roberts' script, and "serious pre-production" (per Selick) began in summer '94, including storyboarding, set design and "one last rewrite" by Roberts, who added more humor based on Ranft's storyboards. When Disney gave the project a formal greenlight, the casting process commenced, followed by two months' work on the film's live-action sections (shot in November and December at two decommissioned naval bases on Treasure Island and Hunter's Point in the San Francisco area).

Even after having directed a project as complex as *Nightmare*, Selick knew he was in for a challenge with *James*. "So much of the story takes place in or on the peach. It rolls down a hill, floats on an ocean, is flown through the air by a flock of seagulls, descends into the Arctic and, on approach to New York, faces a horrendous storm and a monster in the sky before falling onto the tip of the Empire State Building. If you've seen the Alfred Hitchcock film *Lifeboat* [set entirely on a lifeboat], we were faced with the problems of that film times 10. Being that it was a confined space and the characters couldn't really get away from each other, it made the storytelling that much more complex."

Peach problems aside (more than 50 were constructed for the film, in sizes ranging from 18 inches to 20 feet), Selick nailed down his cast so that his team of animators (which began as eight and swelled to more than 20 under animation supervisor Paul Berry) would have vocal tracks to work from.

For the film's live-action portion, Oscar-winning production designer Harley (*Innerspace*) Jessup used Lane Smith's conceptual paintings to fashion "a very muted palette. We wanted everything but the peach to be very desaturated so that when the peach grows on the tree it's practically glowing in its peachy juiciness. Everything was aged way down. There's a German Expressionist quality to the sets. We

Photo: Bo Henry

Much of the film's action takes place inside the hollowed-out core of the titular peach.

Photo: Kelvin Jones

"If the mold people told me they cast 900 Miss Spider faces, I wouldn't be surprised," admits St. Amand. Character fabricator Christine Lasbaw wouldn't be either.

used major forced perspective, which I think works well with the film's storybook quality. We wanted to give the audience a sense of the surreal, dreamlike world in which James lives."

Director of animation photography Pete Kozachik worked closely with live-action director of photography Hiro Narita to "define the film's two looks," not only in terms of "how they would merge, but how they would differ. Hiro's stuff in act one is period-looking, very grey, very stylized," says Kozachik. "He used a fairly grainy, high-speed film to give it a bleak look. For the stop-motion animation, we used the most color-saturated, fine-grained material we could—a subtle way of saying that James is in a better place."

For inspiration during live-action pre-production, Jessup, Kozachik, Selick and company "looked at dream sequences from several Hollywood musicals," recalls Jessup. "During these dream sequences, they go off into these vast soundstage vistas. We also screened *Night of the Hunter*, a beautiful mixture of stage sets and exteri-

Photo: Bo Henry

Photo: Kelvin Jones

Jack Skellington, the hero of Selick's previous film, *Nightmare Before Christmas*, makes a cameo here as a skeletal pirate, courtesy of character fabricator Michele Walas.

or work. We also looked at a documentary called *Grey Gardens*, about an eccentric mother and daughter living in this decaying mansion, to get ideas about how these two crazy aunts might cohabit the same space. For the New York sequences, we looked at the miniatures in *King Kong*. We didn't want it to look too real, because we didn't want a stark contrast between the animation and live action."

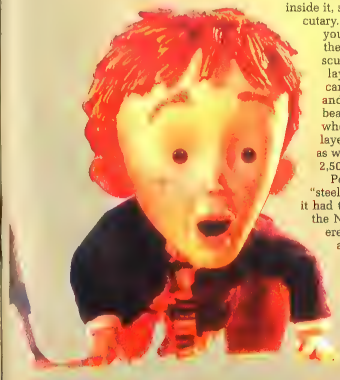
In beginning work on the second act's 45 minutes of stop-motion, the production team started with a most logical reference—an actual peach. "We took a lot of photographs of peaches," Jessup relates. "We picked one Henry liked. B.J. Fredrickson, head of the scenic shop, took that and sculpted our prototype peach, very carefully refining it. The stem had to work a certain way, and the texture and paint treatment had to work in several different scales, from a three-inch peach to an 18-inch peach to a six-foot peach and then finally two 20-foot peaches. Once we got that approved, paint treatment and form were all taken from that 10-inch peach. They cast several dozen six-foot peaches and 18-inch peaches as needed."

The two 20-foot peaches were indeed a sight to behold, says Jessup. "One was made of bead foam [used in bean bag chairs]. The walls were about two feet thick. There was a room inside it, sort of a strange little sanctuary. Before they closed it up, you could actually *sit* in there. That was carved, then sculpted down. A one-inch layer of foam rubber was carefully pieced over that, and a layer of fiber-filled bearing put over that. The whole thing was painted in layers to get as much depth as we could. It weighed about 2,500 pounds."

Peach number two had a "steel frame inside of it because it had to be lifted by a crane on the New York street and lowered down into the truck, and actors were working on it. It weighed about twice what the foam peach did. The foam piece was the one that rolled. One of the practical effects guys said, 'Oh, it's going to break apart if you try to roll that'—there's a scene where it rolls over the aunts' Jaguar. So, we brought in a structural engineer, who had never seen anything like it. He agreed that, theoretically at least, it *should* hold together. And it did. It had a mind of its own—it wasn't built as a perfect sphere—but they managed to control it long enough to roll down the hill."

Jessup believed that this scene would be done as a composite. "But Henry really wanted the big peach on the set, and he wanted it to roll. They got it to roll over the car, then they substituted the smashed car. We did it both live and using a model shot. We had two 1940s Jaguars, one of which we used intact, the other being a smashed version, which actually ran."

Since much of the film's action takes place inside the giant peach, Jessup was required to create a utilitarian interior space that could believably house James and his instant family of insect pals. So, Jessup smiles, "We broke open a real peach. Of course it's completely smooth, with just a seed inside. In the book, it's a sawed-out cube, and we knew we needed more acting spaces than that for the characters to inhabit. It evolved to what looked like the inside of a dirigible cabin. Then, it was like inside a steamship cabin—a strong contrast between the organic outside and a streamlined modern inside. Then, it went back to a very organic interior, almost like a walnut shell



Simon Callow lends his "worldly, rich, cultured voice" to the Grasshopper.

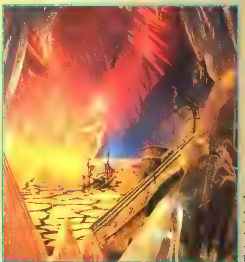
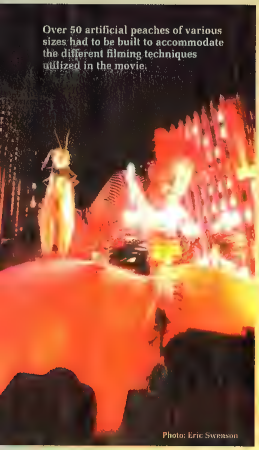


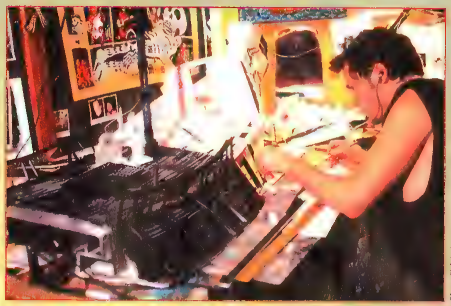
Photo: Andy Lawless

Randy Newman, who provided songs for Disney's *Toy Story*, wrote several tunes for *James and the Giant Peach*.



Over 50 artificial peaches of various sizes had to be built to accommodate the different filming techniques utilized in the movie.

Photo: Eric Swenson



The painstaking work of stop-motion animation begins with the construction of every set, prop and background in the film's fantasy world, supervised by art director Bill Boes.

Photo: Kelvin Jones

inside. We wanted several levels for the characters to move around in. Early on, we decided it would be interesting to include found objects from the garden that had been swept up into the peach. So, there's a sundial for the floor, rakes and other garden tools imbedded in the walls, a seed packet, a jar of marbles—all of which have grown along with the peach itself."

The stop-motion characters are articulated puppets built from scratch. Veteran armature designer Tom St. Amand was assigned the task of engineering and supervising the building of the intricate metal skeletons (or armatures) that go inside the 180 puppets (15 were made for each character) created for the film. The armatures are made out of steel and aluminum and are chrome-plated so they don't rust. Even with joints built in to assist the animators in moving them, they're surprisingly lightweight. As St. Amand explains it, "You want the armatures to have as few restrictions as possible. You don't want things to lock up into a certain pose, because an animator might need an extra eight or 10 frames to ease out of that position and if they can't, everything just grinds to a halt. You want to keep them as lightweight as possible in case the character has to walk; a character must be able to hold his weight on one leg."

If you think St. Amand builds a single armature and simply mass-produces them as needed, think again. "Each of the armatures is different. There are certain joints I've developed over the years, just to save time. But beyond that, each one is different, based on the individual character. Case in point: Centipede has an elongated trunk and six sets of arms—arms that had to work, and shoulders that had to move. Then, I had to determine the number of joints to put in. Three? Ten? Fifteen? Usually I won't put two joints in where one will do, because that makes it more complicated for the animator. If he's halfway through a two-week shot and needs to tighten something, you don't want to make it any harder for him than it is already."

It was also necessary for St. Amand—in conjunction with DeCarlo and mold supervisor Chris Goehe—to consult with Selick to determine if any of the characters' faces needed to be articulated, or if full replacement heads would be required instead. In *James*, three characters were given articulated faces: James, Centipede and Earthworm. "That means you also need to put additional joints inside the face to move the eyebrows, the cheeks, the lips, the jaw—anywhere you need them," he points out. "It is then the animator's job to make the characters talk, or form vowel sounds. Everything is sculpted in advance for all these vowel and consonant sounds."

The remaining characters utilized less complex face masks—rubber pieces that had to be fitted and glued very carefully over the armature. "Each of these faces would last only a few shots, depending on how rough the animator was on it, then the face would have to be replaced," St. Amand continues. "For instance, we built 15 James armatures, but almost 50 articulated James heads. These faces would constantly need to be replaced. If the mold people told me they cast 900 Miss Spider faces, I wouldn't be surprised."

"It's better than I thought it ever could be," raves Roald Dahl's daughter Lucy.

DeCarlo is standing in what she calls her "puppet vault," which rather resembles a disheveled Santa's toy shop. As character department manager—by her end date, she will have been on the project 18 months, some six months less than her *Nightmare* stint—DeCarlo acts as the

Photo: Kelvin Jones

A muted, desaturated color palette was used in the live-action sequences to contrast with the ripe orange juiciness of the peach.

Photo: Ike Henry

cohesive head of all four character departments: sculpture, mold, armature and fabrication.

In addition to teaching technique to the fabrication crew and checking out each part of every puppet before it's assembled—and before it's sent down to the stage for a shot—DeCarlo also ran a crew of "about 12 people who did the finishing and repair of the puppets. I also keep a daily count of all the puppets to make sure every one is accounted for." In addition, she attends dailies each morning to display boxes (James, for instance, stands about nine inches tall) and multiple heads, arms and various articles of clothing, all of which were sewn by hand on the premises. "We get very detail-oriented in what we do," DeCarlo says, pointing out the functional belt loops on James' pants, his genuine leather shoes and one of the 30 specially built monocles (a working magnifying glass, in fact) made by a lensman for Grasshopper.

Surprisingly, the James puppet was the most complicated to create and maintain, as he has five different expressions and "we had to make so many more heads for him than we did the other puppets. They break down very easily, so we're constantly changing them. We use a foam skin that lays atop the armature, then it's attached in different areas to utilize the levers and pins that Tom has designed for underneath the skin. The animator can grab hold of those pins and change the shape of the puppet's mouth." (She turns the corners of James' face and gives him a wide smile; squeezes his eyebrows to form a surprised expression.) "We have five different expressions for James: neutral, happy, mad, panic and sad. From them, the animator can start off using a puppet that reflects the emotion called for in the scene and bring it out further. We get a much wider range than if we were using one standard face."

Miss Spider is another character that proved surprisingly tricky. "She has six legs and two arms. Everything had to be so delicate with her; the foot area was the most delicate of all the puppets—her foot is tinier than Jack Skellington's, and that was pretty tiny. Her range of faces was also very complicated. They're wider, for instance, than the Sally face we did for *Nightmare*, so we had problems with warpage when we took them out of the mold. We ended up doing 690 different paint jobs on her faces, which is a lot of faces. And that's not counting the in-between faces that we did."

An exhausted but smiling Trey Thomas explains that just last night he concluded approximately 16 months of work on *James*. His primary responsibility was Centipede, and he also handled the complicated animation for the comical "Eating the Peach" song (as well as animating Centipede and Miss Spider in another tune called "That's the Life"). Pondering the challenge he faced in animating Centipede, Thomas offers, "It was certainly time-consuming. It was twice the work. A regular character has about eight joints a frame, whereas the Centipede had 72 joints. And when you have multiple characters with multiple arms, it's even more difficult. That's why this project has moved so slowly. You don't look at pencil tests, you don't pass it to the next guy to do his part. You're in there by yourself, with the puppets and the camera, and that's it. That's the nice part about stop-motion. It's funky; it's

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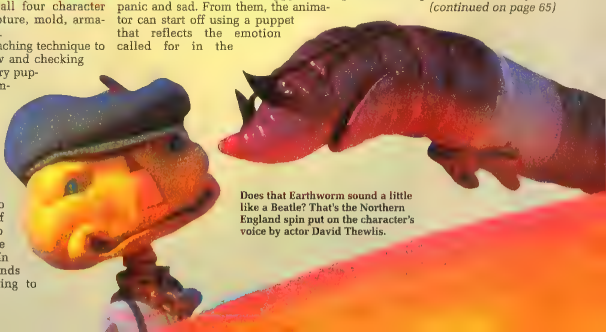

Does that Earthworm sound a little like a Beatle? That's the Northern England spin put on the character's voice by actor David Thewlis.

FIRED UP

Reluctant superhero Alex Sanchez has a great deal to learn about being Firebrand.

By K. JENNINGS HANCOCK

DC's newest superhero has some personal problems, and his creators couldn't be happier about it. Meet Alex Sanchez. As a detective, he has seen enough of the mean streets of New York City to make cynicism a basic element of his personality. When he failed to rescue his kid sister from a fire, her death left him with a guilt complex a mile high, and a paralyzing fear of fire. His father considers him a workaholic, probably because of the way he immerses himself in his search for missing children and the evil fiends who took them. "I do not obsess," he says to the inside of his refrigerator, which is crammed with milk cartons, their portraits of missing children facing him.

He's this close to nailing the kidnappers he's after when his life is irrevocably altered by one simple act: He plays back the messages on his home answering machine. The resulting explosion at the final beep shoots him like human gunpowder through the window of his apartment, where his fall is broken by the cold steel of a parked car, which is totaled. And so is he, for the most part. He has broken 70 percent of the bones in his body.

Someone anonymously foots the bill for his almost $12 million reconstruction, and the cybernetic implants that nearly restore him to normal. Months later, he has 80 percent mobility in his legs, but he will now always require a cane. He can't be a cop, and he can forget chasing bad guys down New York's back alleys.

Alex's mysterious benefactor is Noah Hightower, a multimillionaire philanthropist who lost his own nine-year-old son to abduction, and has spent 25 years quietly endowing a variety of child welfare charities. He is "just a lonely rich man," and sees Alex as a true hero. "I want to put you back in business," he says. Although there's no repayment obligation for his internal remodeling, Alex is offered a chance to help both Hightower and missing children everywhere. All that's required is that he wear a special suit, which combines with the technology placed inside of him and the power of an orbital satellite to give him superhuman powers.

There are just a couple of glitches. Once the suit is on, fire streams out of his helmet, and Alex hates fire. He's a streetwise cop, so superheroes are mythology to him. He can't seem to grasp basic superhero rules of thumb such as "Never turn your back on the bad guys." He realizes he has a great deal to learn.

Firebrand premiered in the DC Comics Universe in December. Conceived by DC editor and writer Brian Augustyn, he's brought to visual life by artist Sal Velluto. "Brian used to be my editor on a different book," Velluto says. "He's the person who hired me at DC, to work on *Justice League Task Force*." Velluto describes

Firebrand & Related Characters & Art Copyright 1996 DC Comics.

Wealthy philanthropist Noah Hightower reconstructs the body of Alex Sanchez and gives him a chance to help find missing children—starting with his own.

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos

All Art: Sal Velluto

Photos: Gerald Silver

"This guy hates fire. He can't stand fire," says *Firebrand* artist Sal Velluto, co-creator of DC's unlucky new flame-headed hero.

OK, superhero assembly experts, let's take a look at Firebrand. The claws and flaming head are always popular features, and check out that Venom-style helmet!

their entire working relationship as "calm, and that's unusual. I've been working with Brian for a long time now. The situation is very conducive for expressing ourselves artistically. We handle this thing independently, but with a common goal."

That common goal is to create a unique character, set apart from superheroes currently in action. "It's a different character from the usual comic-book superhero stereotype," Velluto maintains. "He doesn't fight supervillains like the other guys, but is more involved in a world of mystery and conspiracy, more or less like *The X-Files*. People seem to like that particular mood, so we try to immerse the character in that environment. He deals with situations that are not necessarily paranormal, but might be unexplainable at first glance.

"How do we make this comic book different? That was my goal," Velluto explains, "and I'm sure that was Brian's goal. We've asked that question to ourselves many times. One of the differences we're trying to make is in the quality of the product. We really concentrated on a good story. I put 100 percent into the artwork. On the first three issues, I handled the pencils and inks. I usually do only the pencils. I wanted, first of all, to have more control over the final product, to make sure that, especially with the first edition, which is the introduction of the storyline, that we would have a very strong foundation, and it would be projected the way we wanted it to be. We wanted to give the right impression from the start."

Another difference lies in the storyline and the performance of the character, the mixture of the "day-by-day superhero" and the atmosphere of mystery, intrigue and conspiracy of *The X-Files*. Alex's view of the world around him is realistic, sometimes cynical, and superheroes are far removed from his reality. "So, he has to convince himself," Velluto says, "to do this superhero gig."

Problems arise quickly. "What makes it difficult for him is that the costume he wears is powered up by an external source, an orbital satellite. This satellite shoots a kind of energy beam into his costume, and powers him for four hours a day. With that comes a strange effect, which I envisioned as more of a holographic effect, where fire comes out of his head."

Fire is a definite problem for Alex. "Fire is the thing that he doesn't want to deal with at all," Velluto explains. "This guy hates fire. He can't stand fire. He ends up wearing this suit, and there's fire coming out of his head. He hates that, but he has to wear it if he wants to do good. His little sister died in a fire, and he tried to save her and couldn't. So, he carries this guilt, and this aversion to fire. It's kind of a rehabilitation for him to be a superhero."

Firebrand's reliance on an external

"One of the differences we're trying to make is in the quality of the product," explains Velluto, who reworked the first issue's cover from this initial pencilled version.

power source, the fact that his powers require the assistance of a suit he must put on and take off, his mistrust of his ability to function in a superhero role and his fear of fire are all elements Velluto feels combine to make him a better character. "I think they make him more believable, these kinds of obstacles. He can't just run to the nearest phone booth. For Superman, it's too easy. As a kid, I remember I liked Batman better than Superman, not because Superman wasn't good, but because Batman was more realistic, more down to Earth. I like characters with firm feet on the ground. As an artist, I relate much better to situations where the character is in a real-life environment. And Alex really has problems when he has to become a superhero."

Named both for the flames which surround him and the "brand" of guilt he carries over his sister's death, Firebrand faces constant adjustment to the role he has taken on. He's driven by personal motivations more often found in the man on the street than the superheroes in the sky. Guilt, a desire to see justice done to those who disabled him and the drive to continue the work he was immersed in before the accident all motivate him now. Readers will witness Firebrand's evolution as a superhero, watch him grow and adapt to his new circumstances.

The book is the culmination of a lifelong dream for Velluto, a 40-year-old native of Italy now living in West Jordan, Utah, south of Salt Lake City. He works in a small building in his backyard, originally a woodworking

shop built by the home's previous owner. "It still resembles that woodworking shop in many ways," he says, "because I haven't done anything to it, except add tons of books, and all the stuff I use for my business. I have a nice drawing table, a light table, a computer and a fax machine. And then there's the lawnmower in the corner. I guess when you do this kind of job after a while the environment disappears; you're so immersed in your fantasy world."

Velluto has been immersed as far back as he can recall, always in pursuit of his dream of working in comic books. "When I was a kid," he remembers, "I used to read comics and draw comics. That's the way my parents and teachers kept me quiet. When I was about 10 or 12, I remember sending a small drawing of Batman to an Italian magazine, and they published it. I still have a copy."

He also retains a collection of rejection letters. "I had rejection letters long after I had become a professional. Different editors saying, 'You're not cut out for this,' or, 'You don't have the style we're looking for.' At one of the companies I was working for, a different editor had seen my initial presentations. He wrote me back, saying I didn't have the company's style. I had already been working for that company for almost two years."

Born and raised in Taranto, Italy, Velluto earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Academy of Fine Arts there. "I didn't study to become a comic book artist," he says. "I studied to become a commercial artist." Velluto maintained a studio in Taranto for a few years. "I was doing book illustrations, signs, school books, any kind of commercial art I could get my hands on, but in the back of my mind, I wanted to pursue this dream. At the time, I was just doing anything that would pay my bills."

In 1984, Velluto's talents found a home in the United States. "When I came over here, met my wife and started my family, my first job was as an artist for Saturday morning cartoons, for XAM, which was based out of Salt Lake City then." Cartoons were not Velluto's goal, but animation was closer, in his mind, to comics, and it paid the bills. "We've done so many different shows. I always like to list them, to make people laugh," he chuckles. "We used to do *Punky Brewster*, *Mr. T*, some *Transformers* and *Turbo Teen*, the kid who turned into a car."

Velluto began sending samples to Marvel Comics, and seized an opportunity with *The Official Marvel Try Out Book*. "Marvel published, at that time, a giant-sized comic book which had different tasks for people to accomplish to demonstrate their ability as writers, pencillers, inkers, colorists," the artist says. "I used that as my springboard to send Marvel these samples."

Success took its time. "The reception, at first, wasn't very good. My samples were sent back. But there were little notes from the editors that said, 'OK, try again,' and I tried and tried many, many times. And my samples came back many, many times, until someone either took pity on me, or they were so ticked off at again getting this stuff back, that they gave me a chance to do a try-out story, for which they paid me."

Carl Potts, then an editor at Marvel, was working on the *Power Pack* comic. Potts opened the door for Velluto. "I'll always be in eternal debt to him for doing that," Velluto states. "He trusted me, and looking back now at the kind of drawings I used to do, I don't know how he trusted me with an assignment." Velluto's work on *Power Pack* led to a graphic novel, and a steady, four-year stream of work. He later left Marvel to join DC, working on *Justice League. Firebrand*, his latest DC project, marks the full achievement of his dream.

Velluto's influences are as diverse as his talents. "I think of Norman Rockwell," he says. "A comic book artist has to tell a story in pictures. We have many panels in a page, and many pages in a book to tell a story. Rockwell had to do it in one shot, one picture. I think of Albert Dorne, Alex Raymond—illustrators from the golden age of magazine illustration. Raymond, because he

(continued on page 62)

Among Velluto's influences are Albert Dorne, Alex Raymond and Norman Rockwell.

According to Velluto, Firebrand is "involved in a world of mystery and conspiracy, more or less like *The X-Files*." But how would Mulder and Scully fight these guys?

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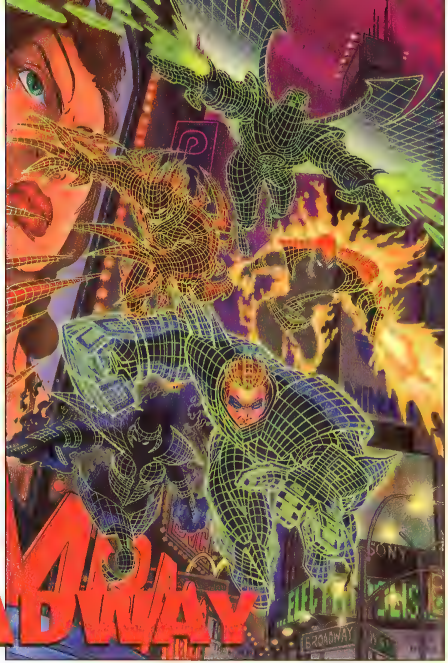


Like a phoenix, Jim Shooter's back, building a new legion of superheroes.

By TOM FIELD

How do you get to Broadway?" asks the old vaudeville joke. "Practice, practice, practice!" If that's so, then Jim Shooter ought to be well-rehearsed for his new position as editor-in-chief of the fledgling Broadway Comics. For more than 30 years now, Shooter has "practiced" all over the comics field.

He started as a 13-year-old *Legion of Super-Heroes* scripter at DC in the 1960s, served a colorful term as editor-in-chief of Marvel in the '70s and '80s, then resurfaced in the '90s, for stints at the helm of Valiant and Defiant.

Now, with the backing (read: deep pockets) of Lorne Michaels' Broadway Video Entertainment, the 43-year-old Shooter hopes to parlay his 30 years of experience into a long, successful run at Broadway Comics.

"We subscribe to the 'If you build it, they will come' school of publishing," Shooter says while relaxing at Broadway's temporary offices at New York's Paine-Webber building. "Our basic business here is creation. If we do it right, the world will beat a path to our door."

Debuting with four company-owned superhero/adventure titles, including the already-released *Powers That Be*, *Shadow State* and *Fatale*, Broadway plans to expand this year to a full line of in-house and creator-owned characters that can be maximized into multimedia success. And "multi-media" is the key word. With Broadway Video's track record in television and film—*Saturday Night Live*, *Kids in the Hall* and *Wayne's World*—hopes are that Broadway Comics can leverage its properties into successful toys, cartoons and films.

Again, those are the *hopes*. Among the *realities* is that Broadway Video also has had its share of failures, and even some of the successes have been marginal. *Saturday Night Live*, after all, is known best for cast members who left

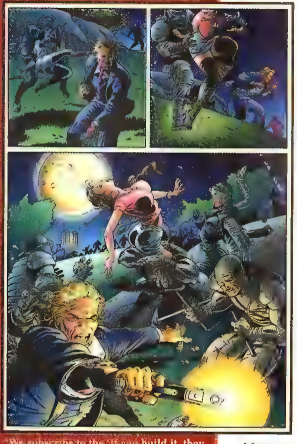
Sometimes, there isn't any spandex to be tight in Broadway Comics, the newest venture from the mind of Jim Shooter and the money of Lorne Michaels.

the show more than 15 years ago, and then there's *Coneheads*, and the recent *Lassie* remake.

Shooter, too, has had his ups and downs. Understandably, he likes to talk about the ups, about how he helped revitalize a stagnant Marvel Comics and about the wars he says he fought on behalf of creators' rights. But to put Shooter's career in proper perspective, one also must understand the downs. For all the gains he helped net for creators during his Marvel years, Shooter made more news for his creative disputes, involving such Marvel luminaries as Gene Colan, Roy Thomas and Jack Kirby.

Shooter was also the creative force behind Marvel's critically panned but financially rewarding *Secret Wars I* and *II*, and (look it up) 1996 is the 10th anniversary of the launch of Shooter's stillborn brainchild, Marvel's "New Universe" comics line.

He was fired from Marvel, forced out of Valiant and Defiant folded around him. Yet, Shooter continues to bounce back from these career setbacks—so much so that *The Comics Journal* recently likened him to the late Richard M. Nixon—and he remains a major player in the comics field.



We subscribe to the "if you build it, they will come" school of publishing," offers Shooter. "Our basic mindset here is creation. If we do it right, the world will beat a path to our door."

The other reality facing Broadway is the current comics market, which is so shaky that even the Big Two are fearful of the deep six. Sales have flushed down the toilet into the sewer, creators are on the street and prophets of four-color doom are everywhere.

What makes *anyone* think Broadway Comics stands a chance?

"*Content*," emphasizes Shooter, who sees Broadway as his best chance to produce the kinds of comics he envisions. "The watchword of the '90s is 'content.' We have content."

More specifically, "story" is what Broadway wants to emphasize. While comics art and marketing gimmicks have been the rage in recent years, Broadway wants to refocus on good storytelling.

"If you look at the history of comics," Shooter offers, pointing to Marvel in the '60s and DC in the '80s, "whenever the industry has gone into a slump, story has brought comics back. Story is *always* in vogue. Other things come and go."

One of the ways Broadway will underscore content is by grounding its stories in real-world authenticity—an approach, coincidentally, that harks back to Shooter/Marvel's "New Universe."

Choosing the Broadway staff "was like the NFL draft," Shooter (top) says. "We got the best players available."

Powers That Be #1, for instance, opens with a shot of a Cadillac impaled atop New York's Chrysler Building spire—and it really looks like the spire. Broadway is sending photographers and artists on location to make sure people and places depicted in Broadway Comics look *right*. Ditto technical detail. For a recent *Powers That Be* storyline involving genetics, Shooter and executive editor Joseph James conducted visual and story research on-site at Cadus Pharmaceutical Corp. in White Plains, NY.

"Our books are set in the real world," Shooter says. "There's more background in our books than anywhere."

The other emphasis, despite the big bucks behind Broadway, is to start small and—with luck—grow modestly from within. When Broadway Comics started up just over a year ago, Shooter

immediately surrounded himself with a supporting cast of business/creative/marketing types. "It was like the NFL draft," Shooter says. "We got the best players available."

Among the Broadway staff are president Winston Fowlkes, a former Time-Warner executive; publisher Barbara Morcerf; and sales and marketing v.p. Steve Schanes, late of Pacific Comics and Blackthorne. Serving as executive editors and co-writers on most of the in-house comics are James, Janet Jackson and Pauline Weiss, with whom Shooter worked variously at Valiant and Defiant.

"It's a nice, tight-knit team," Shooter says. "For whatever reason—masochism, I guess—these people have stuck with me. It's a *good* team."

With the multi-media opportunities and editorial support Broadway offers, Shooter says Broadway can become a mecca for creator-owned projects. "It's one of the best creator-ownership deals ever," Shooter maintains. "Certainly, the best *I've* ever seen."

Another aspect of the managed growth approach is to keep the Broadway line small. "We could do 20 books a month right now," says Schanes, who was a prolific publisher in his own right at Pacific and Blackthorne in the '80s. "We chose to do four—a small core of books that will allow us to establish ourselves as major players."

Trading cards and trick covers are among the trimmings that have risen and fallen in favor in recent years, during which popular characters and titles have multiplied beyond any single reader's reasonable means to keep pace. Broadway won't follow that path.

"One of the problems in a 'boom' phase is that companies lose sight of the core business," Schanes says. "We will never lose sight of our core business. Once you let the core rot, you lose it all."

Broadway is equally committed to comics retailers. Months before its first release, Broadway published six black-and-white advance copies of *Powers That Be*, *Fatale* and *Shadow State*. These preview editions were mailed not just to distributors, but to individual retailers, who then were able to determine their orders based on the merits not just of sample pages, but of entire comics. Broadway will continue this practice with future projects.

Having amassed a sizable inventory of finished pages before its first title even hit the stands, Broadway expects to keep its comics on schedule—another nod to readers and retailers—and both Shooter and Schanes hope to expand Broadway's audience beyond comics fandom, to attract *new* readers to the medium.

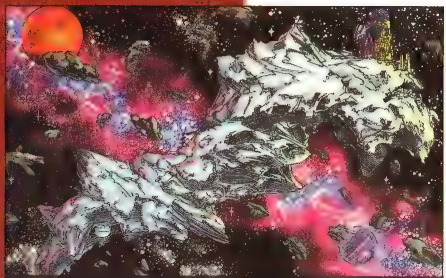
"We want to let our product be known to as large an audience as possible," Schanes says. "The segment of the population that already reads comics is giving us good reaction. Now we want the other 255 million people in America to know us and to come into the comics stores to buy our books."

"Let's not hit them with a one-shot like the *Death of Superman* or *Marvel vs. DC*," Shooter says. "Let's bring them back month after month."

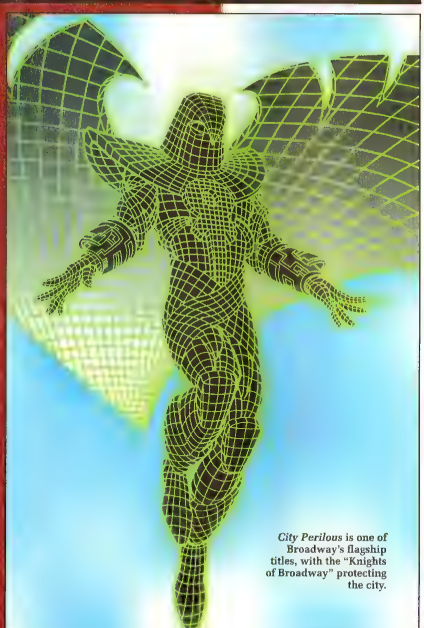
Although the initial Broadway Comics orders reportedly were underwhelming, Schanes, without divulging numbers, says that re-orders and reader response have been strong. "We receive e-mail and letters every day, and we're happy to report the response has been

"When Broadway Video decided to get into this business," says Steve Schanes, vice president of sales and marketing, "their first step was to hire Jim Shooter

Not to be alone in not having a "bad girl" comic, Broadway presents *Fatale*, the story of a lass with powers that mirror the X-Men's Rogue



With the talent that Shooter has backing him up, the sky's the limit for Broadway Comics.



City Perilous is one of Broadway's flagship titles, with the "Knights of Broadway" protecting the city.

CASTING CALL

Up front, Broadway Comics has two objectives: to publish top-notch creator-owned projects, and to support those ventures with a small, steady line of company-owned titles. According to Jim Shooter, for their first six months together, the Broadway creative team did nothing but brainstorm, developing and refining the concepts that would result in Broadway's core comics. These four titles are the nucleus of the Broadway line, with various one-shots and mini-series spinning off from them:

- ***Powers That Be*** was Broadway's debut comic in late 1995. It features "Star Seed," written by Shooter/Jackson/James/Weiss and drawn by Andrew Wendel and Art Nichols. Xolus Cor is the title character, a young super-powered alien half-breed who is in search of his extraterrestrial father and accompanied by a robotic spy-eye named Snoopy. Clad in a long, blue suit and a cape, Cor has a familiar look, but his diet *definitely* is unique.
- ***Fatale*** is the glamour girl of the Broadway characters, starring in her own comic, occasional backups in *Powers That Be* and a third title, *Shadow State*. Described by Shooter

very positive. People *do* support quality comic books."

But will they support them enough to give Broadway Video a sufficient return on its investment? According to Shooter, that's not an issue. "They basically see this as a long-term thing that may take years to bear fruit. But I think we'll be successful far earlier than they expect."

And while Michaels is the big name behind Broadway, his presence is downplayed. Broadway Video is taking a hands-off approach to Broadway Comics, Shooter says, and Michaels would just as soon keep his name out of Broadway Comics publicity. In fact, Michaels, tired of his notoriety for *Saturday Night Live*, reportedly was uncomfortable even with Shooter naming him in a "thank-you" note that prefaced *Powers That Be* #1.

Still, Big Broadway's commitment to Little Broadway is strong, and both Shooter and Schanes concur, "The probability for success is quite high."

"When Broadway Video decided to get into this business," Schanes says, "their first step was to hire Jim Shooter, who for 30 years has been a world-class editor and writer. He can produce

as a " 'bad girl' and something *more*," *Fatale* showcases the title character, Desiree, a brown-haired, barely clad bombshell who somehow has acquired what she calls the "fatale thing," which allows her to siphon people's mental and physical abilities through skin-to-skin contact—especially *kisses*. Desiree is pursued by a pair of paramilitary groups that go to some unique lengths to capture her (they pose as a wedding party in St. Patrick's Cathedral in *Powers That Be* #1).

Although the seductive poses and clothes-ripping action fit the current market rage, Broadway hopes *Fatale* rises above the "bad girl" genre and is appreciated for its *stories*, too. And while Fatale's looks aren't uncommon by "bad girl" standards, and her powers certainly bear strong resemblances to *X-Men*'s Rogue, what other comics characters can claim to be beaten, made love to and *spanked* in their debut issue?

Fatale is written by the "gang of four," pencilled by J.G. Jones (in the title book) and Dave Cockrum (in the backups) and inked by Frank McLaughlin.

Jim Shooter and his Broadway cronies have created a line of comic books to captivate fans the world over...they hope.

- ***Shadow State*** features a comic-within-a-comic. "BloodS.C.R.E.A.M.," written by "James S. Jackson-Weiss III" (which, frankly, is a lot easier to write than "James-Shooter-Jackson-Weiss") and drawn by Hoang Nguyen, is a superteam adventure strip that just happens to be the favorite comic book of Troy Hickenbottom, star of *Shadow State*'s main strip, "Till Death Do Us Part." Hickenbottom, an inmate in a federal penitentiary, is transformed mystically into one of his very favorite of all the "BloodS.C.R.E.A.M." heroes, Superion, and he busts out of prison to reunite with his wife Wendi, who then inexplicably changes into Superion's superbabe, Afterglow. Then things *really* get moving.

  "It's *I Love Lucy* meets *The Bickersons*," says Shooter of "Till Death Do Us Part," which is written, at least initially, by the Broadway quads and drawn by Stephano Gaudiano.
- ***City Perilous*** is the fourth core title, starring the "Knights of Broadway," a superteam that Shooter promises will offer a *new* take on superteams. Creators working on this and other Broadway projects include Tony Bedard, Mark Shainbloom, Ken Klaczak and Dick Giordano.

Later in '96 will come the creator-owned titles, about which Broadway is releasing few details, except to say they include (separate) projects by former Valiant editor Bedard and veteran creator Alan Weiss.

—Tom Field

properties. Everyone knows Jim can create a series of concepts that last over time, and he has surrounded himself by a small but dedicated core of professionals. We're all excited to be here."

As for Shooter, who has worked among the greatest comics creators and characters for most of his life, he looks at Broadway Comics as something of a personal arrival. "As a writer, I always had editors telling me what I should do, what I couldn't do," Shooter says. "I was never really able to do all of the things I wanted to do—things I thought should be done in comics. I was a good employee; I did what I was told. But still, I wanted my chance."

Yet, as editor-in-chief at Marvel, Shooter then found himself answering to the whims of corporate officers. So, when he left Marvel in 1987, Shooter decided the only way he could work in comics was if he was *part* of the corporation. That opportunity came with Valiant's startup in the early '90s, and it was bittersweet. Valiant was a success—it continues to publish today as Acclaim—but Shooter left the company after a falling-out with his partners.

Realizing, finally, that he had to be the man in charge creatively *and* financially, Shooter secured backing for Defiant Comics in 1993. Yet, when the market wobbled, so did Shooter's investors. They pulled their support, and Defiant folded.

"It's not enough to have control," Shooter says of the Defiant experience's lesson. "The best situation is to find friends and allies to surround yourself with. The dream is to be in a company that isn't funded by financial types looking to make a quick buck, but that is a partner who shares your goal."

"I was never really able to do all the things I wanted to do—things I thought should be done in comics," Shooter reveals of the constraints placed on him at other comic book companies.

Broadway Comics, Shooter says, is the realization of that dream. "Broadway Video doesn't need the money," Shooter says. "They're not in this for the money. They simply want us to create, develop and build characters and concepts that will last for years to come."

Soon, Broadway Comics will vacate its temporary quarters and move to its permanent home on 54th Street, in the old Studio 54 building. In its day in the late 1970s, Studio 54 was *the* New York nightclub; its glamour and glitz came to symbolize an era. In the '80s, that all came crashing down.

And so, ironically, it will be in the shell of this former empire that Jim Shooter, comics' once and future empire-builder, will attempt to nurture Broadway Comics into the multi-media leader of the '90s and beyond. Can Shooter and Co. make it on Broadway? Well, the show's open; now the critics—*and* the volatile comics market—will have their say.

TO THE MOON AND BEYOND

The sky's not the limit for tales of real-life heroes like Pete Conrad.

By S.C. RINGGENBERG

Astronaut Pete Conrad went to space four times, and now he's gone again—in a comic book from Pepper Pike Graphix.

"We are the only Pentagon-approved comic book company in the world," jokes Pepper Pike's publisher/writer D.C. Agle.

Charles "Pete" Conrad went into space a total of four times, including two *Gemini* missions, walking on the Moon as the commander of *Apollo XII*, and ramrodding America's first space station, *Skylab I*. He's currently working to bring affordable space travel into the reach of ordinary Americans with the *Delta Clipper/* SSTO project. And now Conrad has dared to venture where no astronaut has gone before: into the wild world of comic-book publishing.

Moon Shot chronicles Conrad's *Apollo XII* mission with a script based on interviews Pepper Pike Graphix publisher/aerospace journalist D.C. Agle conducted with Conrad, Lunar Module pilot Alan Bean and Command Module pilot Dick Gordon. It was published last year in two editions, a museum quality format with heavier cover stock, and a regular comic book. The comic contains the astronauts' actual thoughts at all stages of the mission, including the heart-stopping moment when their rocket was struck by lightning only minutes into the mission, as well as Conrad and Bean's thoughts when they became the third and fourth men on the Moon. A comic with an admittedly educational purpose, it also includes full-page cutaway diagrams of the Saturn V rocket, the Lunar and Command Modules, *Apollo* mission trivia and interviews with all three crew members.

Written by Agle and drawn and colored by comics veterans Alfredo Alcala and Tom (*Groo*) Luth, *Moon Shot* came about after a 1991 meeting between Agle and Conrad. Agle, a self-described "space geek," took the advice of his real-life hero and created one of America's most unusual comic book companies. "Pete has always been kind of a hero of mine," Agle admits. "When I was a kid, I thought he had the best of the *Apollo* astronaut careers, and when I had the opportunity to interview him for *Final Frontier* magazine, I jumped at it. So there I am interviewing this guy, sitting right across from him, and he's actually a cool dude. It was a thrill and we just went on from there, started talking about different ideas. As an aerospace writer, I told him pretty much what everybody tells him: 'You know, sir, I would love to write a book about you.' Because he *is* the first three

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos

All Art: Courtesy Pepper Pike Graphix

chapters in *The Right Stuff*. I mean, he has had an amazing life. He's still flying rockets today. But Pete doesn't want to preach to the choir, and he did not see there being much in it just to write another book. The only people who are really going to believe it are interested in aerospace to begin with. So then I told him, 'Well, you know, I had this idea to do an aerospace comic book.' I thought it would be a really flaky idea, but he loved it. He saw the potential to actually touch the next generation, get kids interested in science and technology, and hopefully some of them will say, 'I read this comic book about these guys who went to the Moon, and here I am standing on the Moon myself today.' "

So, like many other publishers, Pepper Pike Graphix prints stories about heroic figures who wear bizarre costumes and thrill the world with their feats of derring-do. But, Pepper Pike's four-color heroes are *real*: America's astronaut corps, as well as daredevil aviators like the Navy's Blue Angels Flight Demonstration squadron, the Air Force's Thunderbirds and pioneers like the Wright Brothers.

It may seem strange for an astronaut to become involved in publishing comics, but for Pete Conrad, it was a natural choice, having been inspired to go into the aerospace profession by his early interest in newspaper comics like *Buck Rogers* and aviation strips like *Terry and the Pirates* and *Smilin' Jack*. Conrad is also quick to point out an early, and now almost-forgotten comics/space connection: "Back in the early space program days," Conrad recalls, "Snoopy was adopted for the manned flight awareness sort of things. Charles Schulz used to make cartoons of Snoopy saying the right things to the workers about taking care of the spacecraft and everything, and we used Snoopy labels in *Skylab*. Red, white and blue denoted commander, pilot, science pilot, and they put Snoopy on there, too. So, we always had Snoopy with us along on the flights."

In addition to Schulz's graphics of Snoopy the astronaut, the crew of *Apollo X* (Gene Cernan, John Young and Tom Stafford) christened their Command Module and Lunar Module *Charlie Brown* and *Snoopy*, respectively. The *Apollo* crews' distinctive black and white communications headgear, containing a microphone and earphones, were long ago christened "Snoopy hats" by some wag within the space program.

Conrad wasn't the only comics fan in the *Apollo XII* crew. *Moon Shot* depicts fellow astronaut Alan Bean as a teenage soda jerk daydreaming over *Buck Rogers*. What's even stranger is that writer/publisher Agle isn't even a comics fan. He's admittedly more interested in the kind of thrills and excitement that aviation and space exploration produce every day.

With *Moon Shot*, about the *Apollo XII* mission, behind him, Agle is hard at work on a comic starring the Navy's Blue Angels flight demonstration squadron.

Simply getting his comic out gave Agle his own set of thrills, especially for someone who, initially at least, had no idea how a comic book is put together. "It's quite terrifying actually," Agle remembers, "because we got the artwork from our artist and we gave it to this guy who was doing the coloring on a computer. We would print up pages and find some of the colorist's things wrong, and we sweated every detail because we were working with these astronauts, and these astronauts got to the Moon by sweating all the details. That's just the way they run their lives and we wanted to make this comic book as *accurate* as possible.

"So, we had to go back and forth between the astronauts and myself and the artists to make sure that everything from the script to the coloring was correct. And, at the end of all this work, all we got was a CD-ROM. It was just this silvery disk that the colorist handed me and he said, 'There you go.' That was my entire comic book. We sent it down to a comic book printing company and we got back boxes and boxes of printed comics. That's the first time we ever saw what it *really* looked like."

At the 1994 San Diego Comics Con, Agle and Conrad quickly learned that comics fandom is a world unto itself. "Really, it was kind of funny," Agle marvels. "I had this kid come up to me and here I am sitting next to a guy who is the third man to walk on the Moon—is in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*—and some kid comes up to me and goes, 'Hey, do you know where the *Spawn* booth is?' And I said, 'Do you know this guy's an astronaut? He walked on the Moon.' He said, 'Yeah. Do you know where the *Spawn* booth is?' "

Conrad, unlike colleagues such as Michael Collins, Buzz Aldrin and Jim Lovell, chose not to chronicle his adventures in ordinary prose, motivated, in part, by a desire to show his life in terms his grandkids could understand. "I've got six grandchildren, and this comic book is just about right for the first one. It's something that'll make it easier, I think, for my sons to explain to their children what their crazy granddad did."

Conrad also realizes that comics make history come alive in a way that's easily accessible to America's visually-attuned younger generation, most of whom now have only a hazy notion that 12 Americans walked on the Moon between 1969 and 1972. As Conrad notes, "Today, 35 percent of the population of the United States wasn't born when we walked on the Moon. It was about seven years ago when I suddenly realized, talking to a high school graduating class one day, that *none* of these kids were alive when I did this. I had to tell the story a little bit differently. And though we've had many books about the space program written, nobody has really done something for the kids. So I was particularly interested in this because there's no doubt I was influenced by the comics, they got me into my career. If this keeps the space program alive and keeps peo-

Conrad believes a comic book is the perfect format to bring the stories of real-life aviation heroes to younger children.

ple wanting to press on and do these things, why, I'm all for it."

Many very influential and important people share Conrad and Agle's views on the importance of educating America's youth about our space program. Conrad's wife, Nancy, a published author, is listed on the Pepper Pike masthead as editor-in-chief. Nancy Conrad is pleased with the response *Moon Shot* has generated, especially overseas, where people are somewhat less blasé about space travel than most Americans. "It will be translated into other languages—Italian, Japanese and Spanish. A very good part of what we're trying to do here is get into 'edutainment.' You know, many kids learn how to read through comic books, so we're trying to make something to pique their interest in science and technology."

And while no American school system has officially adopted *Moon Shot* as part of the curriculum, the interest from individual teachers and learning institutions has been steady, so much so that the initial print run is almost sold out. A portion of the print run was included as a premium in spacecraft model kids from Revell.

There are plans to reprint *Moon Shot* with a new painted cover done by Alan Bean, who has become an accomplished painter since his astronaut days. "We've talked to Mr. Bean about it, and not only is he a hell of an astronaut and walked on the Moon in *Apollo XII*, but he happens to be an amazing artist. He got a big kick out of being *in* the comic book. That's something new for Al. He told me he really enjoyed it and that he thought the comic was not only accurate, it did a pretty good job of telling what these guys were thinking."

The company's advisory council includes such distinguished members as John Glenn, the senator from Ohio and the first American to have orbited Earth; Admiral Alan Shepard, who made the first American sub-orbital manned flight and was the only one of the original *Mercury Seven* astronauts to walk on the Moon, as the commander of *Apollo XIV*; and Dr. Mae Jemison, America's first female African-American astronaut, as well as veteran broadcaster Hugh Downs and *Apollo 13* movie star Tom Hanks. And while Pete Conrad himself is not listed as a member of the Advisory Council, Agle assures that Conrad's influence and opinions make themselves felt on *all* Pepper Pike projects.

Pepper Pike's next comic is another title near and dear to the hearts of aviation fans. Due out in July, it's the story of the Blue Angels, the Navy's world-famous flight demonstration squadron —the first of its kind, formed back in 1946 at the dawn of the Jet Age. The artist who'll be illustrating *The Blue Angels* is Tony Hicks, a fellow aviation buff. "I've never met Tony," Agle admits, but "he's as big a fan of aviation as I am, and when he found out that I was doing a thing with the world's premiere flight demonstration squadron—that has been seen by over a quarter of a billion people over the past 50 years—he wanted to be a part of it."

"When he found out I was doing a thing with the world's premier flight demonstration squadron, he wanted to be a part of it," says Agle of *Blue Angels* penciller Tony Hicks.

Agle and Conrad are constantly looking to the future, and they have no shortage of good ideas for upcoming comics projects. "We want to do more comics," Conrad asserts. "One of the things that we're finding is that Space Camp and the Visitor's Center in Houston are beginning to think about comics. We'll probably do something on the shuttle. We want to do something on the future. And carrying the fact through, maybe how you would do a Mars mission."

Their ambitious plans focus on aviation and space history. "We have two different areas that we're going to explore next. One is the aviation history aspects of it, like Charles Lindbergh, the Wright Brothers, things like that, and then we're going back into space. We have outlines of both Pete's *Skylab* mission and *Apollo XIII* going. His *Skylab* mission, where Conrad and his crewmates saved a billion dollar program, is very similar to *Apollo XIII*."

As a follow-up to the *Blue Angels* title, he has already outlined a script based on the ill-fated *Apollo XIII* mission. Unlike Ron Howard's much-heralded 1995 film, Pepper Pike's comic won't be based on Jim Lovell's book *Lost Moon*. Notes Agle, "I don't think it's based much on anything except history. Right now the biggest thing I'm doing is concentrating on getting *Apollo XIII* done. And once that one is in the can, we'll go forward and look into other storylines."

One follow-up project that seems a natural companion title to *The Blue Angels* is the story of the Thunderbirds, the U.S. Air Force's crack flight demonstration squadron. It's a project that's still only in the early stages. "We've got a letter out to them. We're going through the same pipeline with the Thunderbirds that we did with the Blue Angels," D.C. Agle explains, then smiles as he offers a final joke. "We are the *only* Pentagon-approved comic book company in the world."

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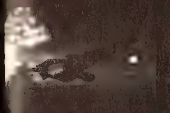
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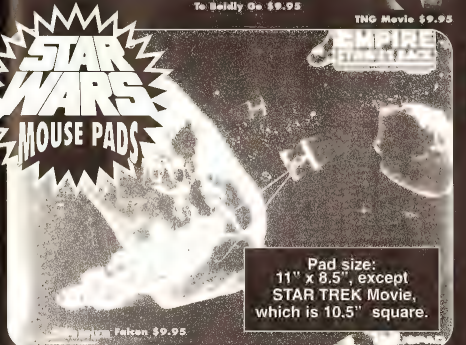

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Freeing up his unconscious helped Jason Lutes create the offbeat world of *Jar of Fools*.

Fools' Magic

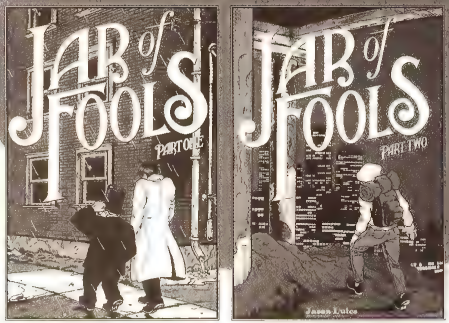
By ANDY LEE

Jason Lutes' independently published *Jar of Fools* is the wonderfully dramatic and touching story of several characters thrown together by fate, each dealing with his own problems, circumstances and character flaws. The story follows Ernie, a young magician grieving over his brother's death and trying desperately to move on with his life; Al Floss, a retired magician trying to escape the home he has been put in and dealing with the hardships of old age; Esther, Ernie's ex-girl friend, also trying to move on after the loss of Ernie's brother; and Nathan and Claire, a father and daughter con man and apprentice, on the run constantly, just trying to get by.

Lutes originally published *Jar of Fools* a page at a time in a weekly Seattle paper, *The Stranger*. He was awarded a Xeric Foundation grant, which allowed him to collect the strips and publish the first part of *Jar of Fools* on his own. That volume garnered much critical praise and both Part One and Part Two are now available from Black Eye Publications.

Though he both wrote and illustrated *Jar of Fools*, Lutes' view of the comic book form is more organic. "I would consider myself more of a cartoonist," he reveals. "That's kind of the peculiar thing about comics. It's pretty easy to think that writing and drawing are the two separate disciplines that together make comics. The way that I conceive of the form, the way that I use it, I think about them both together. That's how I write my scripts. That's how I conceive of the whole thing."

Indeed, Lutes "wrote" *Jar of Fools* using thumbnail drawings and dialogue. The opportunity to do a weekly strip presented itself while he was working in the production department of *The Stranger*. And from that opportunity, *Jar of Fools* started with a simple image, as Lutes explains: "I started out with the image of a melting woman. I think I was looking through some old Golden Age comic, or maybe a romance comic, and there was a man holding a woman's head. I re-drew the picture, only I made her melting through his hands. That was the beginning of the whole thing, just that image."



"I felt like I wanted to tell a long story, but I didn't really know what it was going to be about," reveals Jason Lutes, whose *Jar of Fools* developed one page at a time.

From that point, Lutes felt he was on to something, but it posed a bit of a dilemma. "I didn't know what I was going to do. I felt like I wanted to tell a long story, but I didn't really know what it was going to be about. I had been interested in magic at the time, so I started off with a guy in a tuxedo. Actually, I started off with the dream where Esther melts through Ernie's fingers. I used that image there, but I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know that they had been involved at that point or anything. It was just a dream, and then he wakes up and he's sitting on a bench. Page by page, I explored what was happening to Ernie. The more I made up as I went along, the further ahead I saw what was going to happen. Other characters started to get introduced. It was an exercise in freeing up my *unconscious* to just let the story go wherever it might go."

The title *Jar of Fools* has an interesting genesis of its own, as Lutes explains: "I needed a title that was sort of evocative, but not too specific. I knew that it was probably going to have a certain emotional tone, but I didn't know really what it was going to be about. I was reading a book of Jewish folk tales and there was a story about an angel who's entrusted with two jars by God. One is a jar of non-fools, regular people, and the other one is a jar of fools. The angel is supposed to disperse them equally throughout the world. It scatters them down, and while it's flying, it drops the jar of fools. That's where the town of Helm sprang up. In Yiddish folklore, it's a town entirely populated by fools. That has no bearing on the story that I told; I just liked the kind of impossible phrase, Jar of Fools. It was like a band name."

The rest of the story was pieced together from a variety of unusual sources. "Nathan was based very loosely on an encounter that I had with somebody on the street. But, at the time that I drew him and they had that little exchange, I didn't know that he would end up being a con man or having a daughter. I didn't know that he

All Art: By & Copyright 1994, 1995 Jason Lutes

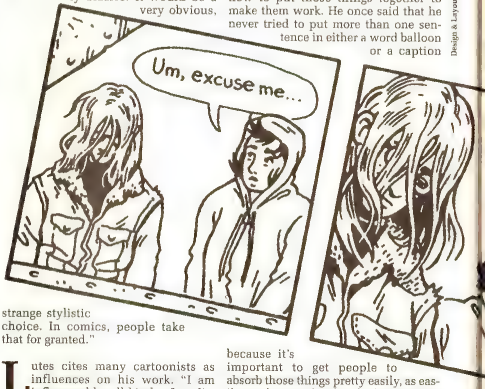
Jar of Fools follows Ernie as he meets up with a variety of odd characters, including retired magician Al Floss and Nathan and Claire, a father-daughter team of con men.

would ever show up again.

"Most of what I feel are the kernels of the stories that I tell; whatever things of value that I'm trying to get across in my stories are usually based on actual experiences that I've had, but I put a spin on them. The two that start off the story—Ernie's exchange with the guy sitting on the bench—is based on an experience I had sitting next to someone on a bus stop bench. When he runs into Nathan, that's another incident that happened to me. The whole story isn't like that, just every other page."

Lutes' affinity for capturing moments and connections between people is evident in his work. Also evident is the influence that film has had on his work. Lutes cites Wim Wenders, the German filmmaker, as an influence. "Film in general is very interesting to me. Obviously, if I'm working in a visual medium, a sequential visual medium, then I'm really interested in the way that people put images one after the other. There's a lot that can be taken from film and applied to comics pretty effectively. At the same time, when you set out to do a comic, you shouldn't think about it purely as a film. There are plenty of qualities that are specific to the form that need to be understood and used for what they are. The same can be said about prose writing. There's an incredible amount that can be learned by *reading* books. Which I don't think enough cartoonists do. By and large, the writing is the weakest part of any comic book you'll find. Primarily, the reason people get attracted to comics is because they like to draw. The reason people read comics is because they like the way they look, so the writing has to suffer."

While film is an influence for Lutes, his main love is comics, and he finds many of the qualities of the medium appealing. "One of the nice things about comics is that when you're drawing them, you can set up a scene. You can show two people in a room with pictures on the walls and a radiator in the corner, and there's all this background detail. You can set up a scene showing that detail, and then you can go to them talking to each other and just forget about the background. Comics have this wonderful quality where somebody sees that original background and it will be there in their heads when they're reading it. They can kind of fill in the gaps that way. If you did that in a film, it would be really bizarre. It would be a very obvious, strange stylistic choice. In comics, people take that for granted."



Lutes cites many cartoonists as influences on his work. "I am influenced by all kinds of media, but when I think of influences, I primarily think of cartoonists. The big ones for me would be Chris Ware [Fantagraphics' *Acme Novelty Library*], Ben Katchor [*Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer*, a weekly strip in the *Village Voice*], Hergé [France's *Tintin* comics] and Art Spiegelman, in terms of the way that he conceives of comics. There's a real simplicity to his work that I totally envy. It's not actually the way that he draws or the way that he writes, but the way he uses comics that really gets me. It's like I was saying before, which one is stronger, the drawing or the writing? For him, it's neither. He's not a really strong visual artist. He's really strong graphically, in terms of composition and where an image's strength lies, but he's no master of anatomy, or some great draftsman necessarily. He's a consummate cartoonist. He knows the mechanics of comics and how to put those things together to make them work. He once said that he never tried to put more than one sentence in either a word balloon or a caption because it's important to get people to absorb those things pretty easily, as easily as they might absorb the pictures. That had a big influence on the way that I think about comics."

Like many cartooninsts, Lutes gives a great deal of thought to the mechanics of his craft. "I did a lot of visual tricks. I have a Polaroid camera and I went out and took pictures of buildings and streets. I use those for reference. Once I had drawn enough buildings and street scenes, I started to be able to make things up out of my head. One of the more appealing things about the medium is the fact that with something as simple as a pen and a piece of paper,

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos

you can draw whatever you want and create a lot from very little. When I originally went to art school, I was thinking about going into film. Besides being prohibitively expensive, it is also incredibly complicated to get a film made. With comics, you just need a paper and pen, and that's extremely appealing to me. So, in the beginning, I was really concerned with trying to keep things simple.

"I drew the whole book with a Rotring art pen, which is just a pen with a refillable cartridge. They have this non-clogging waterproof ink that you can just fill up the cartridge with and it doesn't smear or anything like that. *Jar of Fools* was eight-and-a-half by 11 inches, so it was small by comic-book standards. I drew it on regular-finish Bristol board. I started out doing the thumbnails and writing the script along with that. I go to doing the rough pencils on tracing paper, then I turn the tracing paper over and refine the pencils on the back. Then, I take that and transfer it onto the Bristol like a carbon transfer. I can do a page, in terms of starting pencil to finished inks, in about four hours, depending on how complicated the page is."

Jar of Fools was started in Providence, Rhode Island and completed in Seattle, Washington. Lutes used the city that he created as an emotional backdrop for his story. "When I started *Jar of Fools*, the most formative place in my life had been Providence," he explains. "It sort of became the setting. I think the kind of emotional tone of the story is reflective of the part of my life that I spent there too. There is also a large part of Seattle in it. It's kind of a city that's a combination of the two. Out here, everybody thinks the city is just straightforward Seattle. Cities have very particular character to them and I'm really interested in that. I was trying to get a little bit of Providence in there."

As to the future of the characters from *Jar of Fools*, Lutes has no intention of continuing their story. "I think there's a future for them in people's heads, but that's it for me. There's *not* going to be a sequel of any kind."

Lutes is ready to move on to new projects including *Berlin*, a piece of historical fiction which takes place after World War I in Germany. *Berlin* is published quarterly by Black Eye Publications. "I'd like to tell as many different kinds of stories as I can," says Lutes. "One of the strange things about being where we are in the history of comics right now is that there's such a broad range of stories that haven't been told. That's some part of my choice to do historical fiction. It's simply a reaction to that. For instance, *Kings in Disguise* is a Depression-era story that was pretty well received, but not a whole lot of people saw it. It hasn't been often in American comics that you have gotten the straightforward historical fiction divorced from something like the Invaders in World War II Germany. That will probably continue to be a concern for me. When I finish *Berlin*, the choice of what I do next will be partially based on what I think hasn't been done.

"Probably the core of any story I choose to tell is going to be whether I personally feel some connection to it. The characters in *Berlin* are going to be as closely portrayed as the characters in *Jar of Fools*. It will be about people. You can write a story in the same time that's an adventure story without all the personalities and emotional traits of the people coming into play. I'm not interested in writing a story like that. The main focus of any story I tell is the people and how they interact on a philosophical or emotional level."

Indeed, this is probably most evident in a scene in *Jar of Fools*, Part One, in which Esther is going to work one morning and spots a man on the bridge contemplating *something*. Esther realizes that the man is despondent and reaches out to him. She shares her thoughts and feelings about Ernie's brother's death, and in that moment connects and changes the stranger's life.

(continued on page 60)

"I wanted a way to make her very definitely connected to Ernie and his brother," notes Lutes of Esther's encounter with a suicidal man on the bridge where Ernie's brother died.

"There are plenty of qualities that are specific to the form that need to be understood and used for what they are," Lutes says of the comic book medium.

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Lutes

(continued from page 59)

Many have remarked to Lutes on the power of this scene. He explains what he intended for the scene, but is at a loss to understand the precise element that made the scene so powerful. "At that point, I was still making things up as I went along, and I said, 'OK, she's going to work and I'll just have this person looking off the bridge.' I'm pretty sure that I didn't know that Howard [Ernie's brother] had jumped off a bridge. Although in the dream he jumps off a bridge, so I said that it'll be a bridge in reality, but it will be a very different bridge than in the dream. I started to draw her walking and I said, 'OK, this will be the bridge. This will be the bridge where he does it.' I had somebody staring off into the water. I wanted a way to get at her relationship to him jumping off the bridge. Maybe it worked. Maybe it's strong, because it does sort of tie her back in to Ernie. Maybe it helps the story seem a little more *connected*. It gives her a chance to talk about that. Whereas before, she's just this woman whom Ernie dreams about and isn't very real. I wanted a way to make her very definitely connected to Ernie and to his brother."

Since completing *Jar of Fools*, Lutes has left his job as Art Director of the newspaper to pursue cartooning as a full-time career. "My cartooning probably suffered. It was an incredibly stressful and incredibly demanding job. What I gained in skills, I gained pretty quickly and then it just became a job. On top of that, I had to be drawing the strip every week. If anything, it was probably a detriment to that actual book. I learned a lot from the job itself. It definitely taught me that I don't want a regular nine-to-five job that involves creative energy, the expenditure of my own personal creative energies, when I want to use that on my own time. That's why I prefer sort of a mindless job, so that I still have that energy when I come home and want to work on my comics."

Despite the pressures on the independent cartoonist today, Jason Lutes found creating *Jar of Fools* had definite rewards. "I'm really appreciative of the reception that it got from the people who do react to it and write me about it, or people I talk to about it—it's just really, really gratifying to feel like I've actually communicated with somebody. Whatever these ideas are that I'm trying to get across, some people get them and some people don't deeper than others, I try to put a lot in there. Whenever I hear that anybody kind of understood it, it reminds me of why I'm doing it in the first place."

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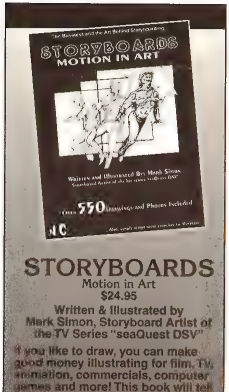
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Velluto

(continued from page 45)

gave substance and importance to the comics. He introduced the art."

Stan Drake is also a role model. "He did *The Heart of Juliet Jones*. Probably nobody would remember that; it's from the '50s. I had the chance to work with Stan Drake at the very beginning of my career, so that was a dream situation. He was doing *Power Pack*. I was doing the pencils, he did the inks. Working with names like that in the comic book world is like working with Elvis Presley if you're a singer. I talked to him on the phone once, but he didn't have any advice. He just said, 'Keep doing it, you're doing a good job.' "

Velluto is more expansive in his own advice to what he terms "aspiring," not "struggling" artists. "Oh no, stop struggling!" he shudders, remembering his own earlier frustrations. "You have to make yourself competitive, because there's a whole lot of competition out there. It's like sports. You can't aspire to play on a professional football team if you haven't reached that level. You have to train yourself, and exercise to develop those artistic muscles to an entry level for the business. You're going to be called on to illustrate any situation, any sort of setting. You have to make what you're drawing believable to that reader, because if you don't do so, you're going to lose that reader." When in doubt, Velluto recommends, look it up. If you don't have the book, get it. Buy it, borrow it or go to the library, but get it. His studio is packed with reference materials, from encyclopedias to *National Geographics*, and for him they are indispensable.

Of upcoming *Firebrand* issues, Velluto says, "I think the mood is getting thicker. We're developing the cast of characters. We're going to introduce Firebrand's love interest. We're going to introduce Firebrand's main nemesis, Max the Knife, a serial killer. This serial killer is striking again, eight years after he has been in bed, paralyzed. Firebrand will have to figure out how this guy can kill again, from a hospital bed. We're going to see shadows of romance, of danger to come."

There will also be crossovers with other characters in DC's universe, as Firebrand guest stars with Metropolis' Guardian in *Showcase '96* #4. Future team-ups are under consideration, but Sal Velluto is giving no details away. His simple recommendation is to read it for yourself. "I think if people give us a chance, out of the multitude of publications out there, they'll be pleasantly surprised, and very satisfied with what they see."

Bolton

(continued from page 11)

comic. Ten pages doesn't sound like a lot, but it is if you're already scheduled for something else. I also did *Dragon Moon*, which again started out as black and white with color plates, and that grew into 40 paintings. All the time, I was in the middle of *Man Bat*, and did something like 15 pages, and then it was advertised that I was working on it, and it would be out next year. It was being marketed without me even working on it, so suddenly everyone was wondering *why* it wasn't out.

"The other thing is, *Man Bat* was 146 pages in length including wraparound covers. That is *a lot* of work for anybody and to expect to maintain the quality—I have a certain quality control in my head, and I would never let it go until I think it's right. It might be the only Batman project I'll ever do, so I can look back at it and know I've done the best that's humanly possible. In the end, I think it's a great package and I'm really pleased with it."

In recent months, Bolton has been taking a temporary hiatus from his comics work in order to pursue other artistic challenges. "Right now, I'm doing a series of paintings for Wizards of the Coast. I've also got two projects coming up with Dark Horse. I'm illustrating a book for White Wolf, and I'll be working on a set of trading cards for FPG. That's where I'm at."

In addition to all the other irons he has in the fire, Bolton has two more projects he's trying to find a home for. "One is an erotic graphic novel, which is with one publisher, but because of the state of the market, it's very difficult to put something like that out at the moment.

"There's another project, which has a better chance of seeing the light of day. It is about a character called Menzinsana. I'm working with a writer friend, Christopher Fowler who wrote *Roofworld*. We came up with this character about three years ago, which appeared in a very short-lived magazine. That's a character I very much want to get back into doing."

For the time being, John Bolton is happy to devote his time to other artistic endeavors, but at some point he knows he'll be returning to his comic book roots. "Comics are such a labor of love that you need to get away from them or they'll just consume you. I'm philosophical about it. One finishes doing comics, and is suddenly doing 25-30 paintings which is fine. I will have withdrawal symptoms if I stay away from comics; I need my comic injection!"

X-Files

T-Shirts $14.95

T-shirts in this section have the X-Files logo screen printed in two colors on the front, left chest

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The Truth
Black 100% Cotton t-shirt with "The Truth is Out There" logo imprinted in green on back
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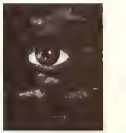

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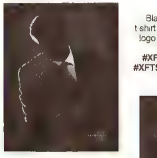

***New!* "The Eye - Z"**
Black 100% cotton t-shirt with a silk screened eye behind the X-Files logo printed in two colors on the front
#XFTSLK11 - Large
#XFTSXK11 - X-Large

The X-Files Mug
Black mug screen printed with *The X-Files* logo in two colors on front "The Truth is Out There" logo on back
#XFMM1 - $9.95

The X-Files Hat - "X" Logo
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James

(continued from page 41)

rough around the edges; it has a homemade quality that makes it charming."

The cast of *James* is an exceptional blend of "tonalities and accents and rhythms," as Selick describes it. "It's like different instruments in a band. You have to get the right blend. In a jazz combo, you don't necessarily want two pianos or two basses. You've got to get just the right combination."

Today he is raving about Susan Sarandon, who just completed looping dialogue for her maternal web-weaving character, Miss Spider (originally conceived as an ant in Dahl's story). "I showed her some of the finished movie today and she was really jazzed," he beams. "I don't want to say she was the greatest casting coup of the film, because all the actors are wonderful. But she's exceptional. She's one of our country's greatest actors. We only got to use her voice, but what a voice!"

He then pauses to note each cast member. As the Grasshopper (a "froghopper" in Dahl's early draft) *Four Weddings and a Funeral*'s Simon Callow has a "wordly, richly cultured, proper gentleman voice. David Thewlis, who was in *Naked* (and in *Dragonheart*), is our Earthworm. He has a Northern England accent, a bit like Ringo Starr's. He ended up getting some of the biggest laughs in our test screenings. Jane Leeves is Ladybug [once a beetle]. We went through many Ladybugs to find the right one. Jane does a voice similar to her Daphne Moon character on *Frasier*, but she was able to age about 30 years and put on 50 pounds—in her voice—for the character. A fabulous job."

Harder to nail down was an actor for Centipede. "We went through a lot of Centipedes—it was a very tough role to cast, as he was the only American. We gave him a Brooklyn accent, which could easily have become too cartoony, something I wanted to avoid. We used Fisher Stevens early on and a few other folks, all of whom were very good in their own way, but Richard Dreyfuss ended up as Centipede. As a live actor, he has on occasion come off almost like Bugs Bunny. He's the most revved up of the characters, very blustery and full of himself."

For Glowworm (formerly a dragonfly), a "dotty old uppercrust English woman," he employed Miriam Margoyles, who also plays Aunt Sponge in the film's live-action portion. "She has a huge range of voices. As Aunt Sponge, she's the shorter, wider of the two sisters, a lower-class English person. She's very funny, with incredible facial expressions. The other aunt is Aunt Spiker. Most people know Joanna Lumley from *Absolutely Fabulous*. She's an exceptional actress, very beautiful, who loves to put on wigs and makeup and make herself look ugly. We went for Å Cruelle De Vil look with skeletal cheekbones and horsey teeth. She really enjoyed being the more sophisticated sister, dressing up and putting on airs."

Pete Postlethwaite, late of *The Usual Suspects*, plays the mysterious Old Man who gives James the "tiny littl[e] green things" that cause his aunt's peach tree, and the insects living in the tree's soil, to grow to mammoth proportions. "In the book, he's a little, magical old man; we made him more of an English hobo. Pete has a super-expressive face and eyes, and a beautiful, rich voice. We have him show up at the end in New York, to tie the story together and continue his role as agent of magic for James. We also made him the film's narrator."

Paul Terry won the role of James Henry Trotter over several hundred young hopefuls. Why Terry? "I knew he would be able to put up with a lot of hard work," Selick explains. "His acting experience was very limited—he had only been in a couple of school plays—but when I saw his audition tape, I made a note that I wanted to see him in person. He wasn't in the top five choices, but when he came in, he did a cold reading of a new scene that knocked me out. We started shooting when he was eight and while we were shooting, he had his ninth birthday."

There's also a cameo by *Nightmare's* Jack Skellington, who appears in a scene Selick added that takes place in a pirate ship graveyard and includes a homage to the classic skeleton sword fight created by Ray Harryhausen for *7th Voyage of Sinbad*. "We needed skeletons, and I wanted each one to be different-looking. So there's a giant Viking skeleton and an Eskimo skeleton and a strange Donald Duck skeleton. I also wanted a tall, skinny one. He started looking more and more like Jack Skellington, so I said, 'Let's get Jack Skellington—I think he's available!' "

Though *James and the Giant Peach* isn't a musical per se, there are five songs in the film, composed by pop musican Randy Newman. Says Selick of the choice, "Randy was a Disney recommendation early on, one I wasn't initially in favor of. Not because of Randy's music, which has been wonderful, but because John Lasseter was already working with him [on *Toy Story*]. I didn't want the next Disney animated feature to *also* have songs by Randy Newman; I was looking for something else. Andy Partridge of XTC was discussed, as was Elvis Costello and Howard Blake, a British composer. Disney wasn't comfortable with those folks. They recommended some composers we did some demo songs with, but the material did not work—they were way too schmaltzy and false."

The situation changed when Selick sampled a tune from *Toy Story*. "I said, 'Let's give Randy a try, I don't care anymore that he's already doing *Toy Story*, he's the best candidate for the job.' It has worked out wonderfully. I'm very happy with his songs. We did use some of the lyrics from the book for the 'Eating' song ["Eating the Peach"], but the others ["My Name Is James," "That's the Life For Me," "We're Family" and "Good News"] are all original. I went into this project trying to honor as much of the book as possible, but along the way things got chopped and changed; it's just part of the process."

How has he managed to keep his enthusism for the project alive for so long? Selick is quick with a response: "First, I've been working with the best stop-motion control people in the world. I'm very much inspired by their work. Every day I see a variety of camera tests, drawings, art direction, puppets that are fabricated and modified, and ultimately the animation tests and final takes—they're all extraordinary. I'm inspired by the level of expertise and artistry of the crew."

Then, there are the "thrills along the way" of seeing completed shots or, as he puts it, "the miracle of inanimate things coming to life. It still dazzles and amazes me." Finally, there is the support Selick gets from his wife and four-year-old son, whom he describes as "very understanding. They know what it takes to do a movie like this, and I don't get much guilt for all the hours I put in."

His hopes for the film are quite simple. "My hope is that we connect with the movie's intended audience—kids. Fairly young kids—four or five years old on up through early teens. I hope that it's exciting to them and if they've read the book, they feel it accurately reflects Roald Dahl's story, changes and all."

Lucy Dahl admits to being "thrilled" by the two rough cuts she has seen of *James and the Giant Peach*. "It's really beautiful. The personalities of the characters, the live action, the way it's done...it's fabulous. Did Henry manage to walk along that imaginary line between tragedy and humor? Yes, he did. He didn't just walk in and say I'm going to do this film the way *I* want to. Henry studied my father's work, he asked questions, he looked through my father's *James* files in England—he really, really worked to get it right. And he did it. It's better than I thought it ever could be."

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ANIMATION SCENE

Honoring Chuck Jones

On March 25, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences will honor Chuck Jones with a lifetime achievement Academy Award, for "creation of classic cartoons and cartoon characters whose animated lives have brought joy to our real ones for more than half a century."

The legendary Jones recently wrapped production on "Superior Duck" and is now working on a new Bugs Bunny short. A previous short, "Another Froggy Evening," has yet to see wide release, though it made the "short" list for the Oscars this year.

***Anime* for $9.98:** This is the new, reduced price for several Streamline Pictures Video Comics, distributed by Orion Home Video. These include two 30-minute episodes of *Lupin III: Tales of the Wolf*: "Aloha, Lupin" and "Albatross: Wings of Death," both directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

Also, four 29-minute episodes of *8 Man After*: "City in Fear," "End Run," "Mr. Hallowe'en" and "Sachiko's Decision." 8 Man, the cyborg cop, was created by Kazumas Hirai and Jiro Kuwata years before RoboCop and Marvel Comics' Deathlok.

3x3 Eyes, based on the *manga* by Yuzo Takada, is an occult series with four half-hour episodes. All are available at $9.98 apiece.

Anime Art Courtesy Manga Entertainment

So, you want to know everything about *anime*, eh? Well then, get your mitts on *The Complete Anime Guide*.

Now in Bookstores: *The Complete Anime Guide* by Trish Ledoux and Doug Ranney, edited by Fred Patten, is the *definitive* video directory of nearly 1,000 home videos with credits, plot synopses and advisories of adult content (violence, profanity, nudity, sexual situations, adult viewers only). There's also a 15-year history of Japanese animation fandom (up to 1992) by Patten, and a reference section that lists *anime* fan clubs, *anime*-related magazines, Internet newsgroups, conventions, *anime* video suppliers, distributors and *anime* retail businesses—*plus* appendices that list production credits and a guide to terms. Whew! Lavishly illustrated, the 218-page book is a bargain at $19.95. Highly recommended.

The Complete Guide to Animation and Computer Graphics Schools, by Ernest Pintoff, is a 320-page trade paperback, available for $16.95. It lists schools that offer animation-related training. There are also 50 profiles of industry pros offering advice. These include Ralph Bakshi, Bill Hanna (theatrical and TV), John Lasseter (computer graphics), Stan Lee (comics into cartoons), Stan Freberg and Noel Blanc (voiceovers), Linda Simensky (programming and production), Emru Townsend (racial stereotyping) and Fred Patten (the Japanese practice of using animation for dramatic cinematic storytelling).

More Disney Departures: James Baxter (supervising animator, Rafiki) and Will Finn (Cogsworth) have joined the feature animation unit at DreamWorks, where they'll work on *Prince of Egypt*.

Cartoon Network Entries: *Dexter's Laboratory* begins its run as a 13 episode series April 28 at 6:30 pm EST.

Cow and Chicken is the second World Premiere Toon to expand to a 30-minute series. Charlie Adler voices the muddle-minded Cow and hot-tempered Chicken.

Beginning March 5, *Speed Racer* revs up for weekday airings at 5:30 p.m. EST, and on Saturdays at 3:30 p.m. EST. Unlike its MTV broadcast, the show will run with end credits intact on the Cartoon Network.

D'oh! Yes, it's "Powerpuff Girls," not "Powderpuff Girls."

Worm Misses Early Bird: Eddie Fitzgerald's "Tales of the Paranoid Worm," scheduled to air February 11, was postponed because the short hadn't been completed. In its place, the Cartoon Network

Hey! Anybody wanna buy a monkey? If so, *Dial M for Monkey*, airing on the Cartoon Network as part of *Dexter's Laboratory*.

Art: Copyright 1998 Cartoon Network

aired "Hillbilly Blue," while "Gramps" took "Blue"'s March 3 spot. "Gramps," by Mike Ryan, stars an irascible old man who forces his grandkids to believe his outrageous stories.

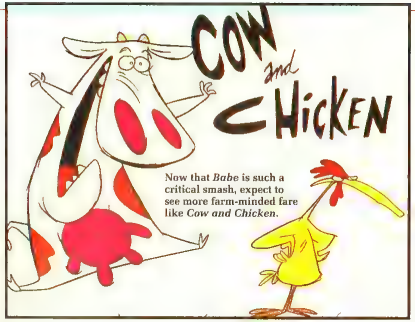
Cartoon Network Video is a new label created by Turner Home Entertainment. The first releases are four videos from the 1964 series *The Adventures of Jonny Quest*, entitled *Classic Jonny Quest. Adventure's Best Friend* contains "Attack of the Tree People" and "Terror Island." *An Army of One* has "Mystery of the Lizard Men" and "Double Danger." *Mysteries of the East* features "Calcutta Adventure" and "Pirates from Below." Dr. Zin stars in *Master of Evil*, which contains "The Robot Spy" and "Riddle of the Gold."

Each video is individually priced at $12.98. As a bonus, an episode of *Space Ghost* is included, plus an exclusive, limited edition *Jonny Quest* comic book and a World Premiere Toon such as "Johnny Bravo," "Cow and Chicken," "Dexter's Laboratory" or an episode of *2 Stupid Dogs*.

The recent 90-minute TV-movie *Jonny Quest vs. the Cyber Insects* will sell for $14.98. The videos will be released March 19, and will only be available for three months.

It's Spring, Oliver: Eight years after its initial release, *Oliver & Company* is back in theaters on March 29. The 72-minute film was directed by George Scribner and written by Jim Cox, Timothy J. Disney and James Marigold. There are five original songs performed by Billy Joel, Huey Lewis, Bette Midler and Ruth Pointer.

In modern-day New York, an orphaned kitten named Oliver (Joey Lawrence) joins a gang of dogs trained as pickpockets by the human Fagin (Dom DeLuise). Jenny (Natalie Gregory), a girl from Fifth Avenue, takes Oliver in as a pet, but both are abducted by Fagin's boss, Sykes the loan shark (Robert Loggia). To the rescue comes Dodger (Joel) and his fellow mongrels Tito (Cheech Marin), Francis (Roscoe Lee Browne) and a Great Dane named Einstein (Richard Mulligan). Midler voices a snobbish poodle, Georgette.



Now that *Babe* is such a critical smash, expect to see more farm-minded fare like *Cow and Chicken*.

Peachy Keen: This April, Disney is releasing *James and the Giant Peach*, based on the 1961 book by Roald Dahl, from director Henry Selick and the artists responsible for *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. The film is a blend of live action, stop-motion animation and computer-generated animation. For more, see the comprehensive chronicle on page 34.

Pocahontas Power: Disney's politically correct *Pocahontas* was released in February on home video, retailing for $26.99.

A Deluxe Collector's Edition, priced at $79.99, adds the *Pocahontas* documentary, a copy of *The Art of Pocahontas* and a set of artwork that includes a lithograph. You can get a $5 rebate if you also purchase a Disney "Masterpiece" or "Family Film" video. Nestlé provides another $5 if you buy six of their products. A laserdisc release has yet to be announced.

More Disney Videos: Coming April 24 is Disney's 20th animated feature, *The Aristo-*

Young Hanna-Barbarians: Pebbles and Bamm Bamm—the baby versions, that is—are starring in *Cave Kids*, eight 22-minute OVAs to be marketed next spring. Stories will stress the usual themes of friendship, loyalty, sharing and teamwork, reinforced by a two-minute music video. Aria Curzon and Taylor Gunther (baby daughter of studio executive Sherry Gunther) voice Pebbles, while Christine Cavanaugh and E.G. Daily take turns doing Bamm Bamm (speaking and singing, respectively). Frank Welker barks for Dino. Other voices come from Jeff Bennett, Sally Struthers, Charlie Adler, Rob Paulsen, Maurice La Marche, Tress MacNeille and June Foray. The producer is Marija Dail; executive producer is Sherry Gunther.

Now, you too can learn morality from Pebbles and Bamm Bamm in *Cave Kids*.

Writers are Mirith Colao, Don Goodman, Ken Koonce & Michael Merton, Susan Talkington and story editor Bruce (*The New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*) Talkington.

A quick episode guide:

"Sand Castle Surprise": Good friends can make fear disappear.

"Kiss and Spell": It's important to be responsible for your friends and your possessions.

"Beanstalk Blues": The value of loyalty.

"China Challenge": Cooperation.

"Of Mice and Moon": Tolerance.

"Snow Bear Christmas": Christmas is giving, not getting.

"Color Me Cave Kid": Sharing.

"Soap Bubble Dreams": Friendship.

From February 1963 to March 1967, Gold Key published 16 issues of a *Cave Kids* comic book, but aside from Pebbles and Bamm Bamm, none of its characters (like Sally and Sandy Stone, Sheepy Shale, Suzy Quartz, Gypsy Crystal and Rocky Ranger, the world's first superhero) appear in the new OVAs.

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An ASIFA Near You: Past issues have noted events staged by ASIFA-Hollywood and ASIFA-East, but there are other chapters of ASIFA-International that you can participate in. Enjoy the benefits of private screenings, newsletters and network with both fans and professionals.

One member, Milton Knight, submitted artwork regularly to ASIFA-Hollywood's newsletter, *The Inbetweener*. Management at Film Roman saw it, liked Milton's style and—taking his professional credentials into account—hired him as a director on *The Twisted Tales of Felix the Cat*.

Each ASIFA chapter has its own membership fee and benefits, but you can join more than one chapter. Here's a list of the ASIFA chapters in the English-speaking world:

ASIFA-Central, c/o Deanna Morse, School of Communication, 268 LSH, Allendale, MI 49401.

ASIFA-East, c/o Jim Petropoulos, 10 Point Crescent, Whitestone, NY 11357.

ASIFA-Hollywood, c/o Antran Manoogian. 725 S. Victory Boulevard, Burbank, CA 91502.

ASIFA-Northwest, 4380 SW 86th Avenue. Portland, OR 97225.

ASIFA-San Francisco, c/o Karl Cohen, PO Box 14516. San Francisco, CA 94114.

ASIFA-Washington, Tom Krawczewicz, PO Box 53101, Washington. DC 20009.

ASIFA-Canada, Case postale 5226, Saint-Laurent, Quebec H4L 4Z8, Canada.

ASIFA-Great Britain, c/o Pat Webb, 3-7 Kean Street, London WC2B 4A7, England.

ASIFA-Ireland, c/o Eileen Fleming, 4/5 Eustace Street, Temple Bar, Dublin 2, Ireland.

cats. First released in 1970, and later in 1980 and 1987, the film cumulatively has grossed $130 million.

In turn-of-the-century Paris, an elegant cat named Duchess (Eva Gabor) and her three kittens, Toulouse (Dean Clark), Berlioz (Gary Dubin) and Marie (Liz English) are named heirs to the family fortune. But greedy butler Edgar (Roddy Maude-Roxby) cat-naps the felines to the country to dispose of them. To the rescue come two hillbilly hounds (Pat Buttram as Napoleon, George Lindsey as Lafayette), a detective mouse named Roquefort (Sterling Holloway), alley cat Thomas O'Malley (Phil Harris) and a jazz band of cats (led by Scatman Crothers as Scat Cat). Nancy Culp (Jane Hathaway from *The Beverly Hillbillies*) voices Frou-frou the horse.

The 79-minute film retails for $26.99, with $10 rebates available by purchasing another Disney video and a General Mills cereal.

Aladdin and the King of Thieves is the second OVA sequel, due in August. It's happily-ever-after time when Aladdin (Scott Weinger) reunites with his father, Cassim (John Rhys-Davies), and marries Princess Jasmine (Linda Larkin). Iago (Gilbert Gottfried) and monkey Abu (Frank Welker) are around for the festivities—which may be spoiled by the villainous Suluk (Jerry Orbach, Lumiere from *Beauty & the Beast*). The Genie had been recorded by Dan Castellaneta (the animated TV series alter-ego), but a reconciliation between Disney and Robin Williams has enabled the Genie to get his original voice back.

Williams sings "There's a Party Here in Agrabah" and "Father and Son." The Forty Thieves sing (what else?) "Welcome to the Forty Thieves." Orbach performs "Are You In or Out," while Weinger and Larkin share "Out of Thin Air" as Aladdin and Jasmine. There's also a "special" reprise of "Arabian Nights" by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken.

The latest in Disney's "Favorite Stories" series is *The Wind in the Willows*, released in January. This was part of the studio's 11th animated feature, *Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949), in which J. Thaddeus Toad's recklessness with motorcars lands him in jail, and inspires a ride at Disneyland. The 34-minute adventure comes with a full-color storybook. Other "Favorite Stories" videos are *Mickey & the Beanstalk*, *The Prince & the Pauper*, *Peter & the Wolf*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Paul Bunyan* (with *Little Hiawatha*), priced at $12.99 each.

Arabian Knight, formerly Richard Williams' *The Thief and the Cobbler*, was released last year by Miramax, but plans for a video release have been shelved.

Ducks Invade the Disney Afternoon: This fall sees the debut of the animated *Mighty Ducks*, who make their residence at the home of the real-life Mighty Ducks hockey team, Anaheim Pond. These ducks also play hockey, while maintaining secret identities as superheroes and aliens from another dimension, the Duckworld Galaxy. Their mission: defend Earth against the evil reptilian warlord Draconius and his henchmen the Wraith, Siege and The Chameleon. The heroes—who happen to be teenagers—are Wildwing, Nosedive, Mallory, Tayna, Ducques L'Orange and Grin. Their manager is Phil, the one human the Ducks trust (sound familiar, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* fans?).

The story editor is David Wise, who did the same duty for *Ninja Turtles*. His credits include *Star Trek*, *Batman* and *W.I.L.D.Cats* (STARLOG PLATINUM #1). Identical concept. Same story editor. Same storylines? Stay tuned.

Disney continues the trend of hiring well-known live-action actors to do voiceover roles. From *Beverly Hills 90210*, Ian Ziering voices the idealistic team captain Wildwing. His special goalie mask was created by legendary Duckworld warrior Drake DuCaine, endowing him with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal ducks.

In the first episode, "Micro Ducks," Dennis Franz voices Klegghorn, a cop upset by the ducks invading his crime-fighting turf. Jim Belushi is Phil, the ducks' human manager. Arch-fiend Draconus is voiced by—you guessed it—Tim Curry.

Veteran voice specialists include Steve (*Marsupilami*) Mackel as Nosedive, Wildwing's "wisequacking" kid

Quest Art: Copyright 1996 Cartoon Network

Who knew white-haired guys were so cool? Relive the adventures of Race Bannon and the whole Quest team with *Classic Jonny Quest*.

brother; Brad (*2 Stupid Dogs*) Garrett as Grin, a hulking mallard who relies on brute strength and Zen in his battles; Jeff (*Gargoyles*) Bennett as the swashbuckling Ducques L'Orange; April (*Goof Troop*) Winchell as the Spock-like science expert; and Jennifer (*Spider-Man*) Hale as Mallory, master of the martial arts.

Producer/director is Joe Barruso, who previously produced *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?* for DIC.

Thirteen episodes will be produced for syndication and another 13 for ABC Saturday morning.

More Ducks: After a year's delay thanks to *Gargoyles*, *Duck Daze* will premiere in syndication this fall. Thirty-nine episodes star Donald Duck (Tony Anselmo), now a cameraman on an entertainment news show called *What in the World?* Testing Donald's patience are his nephews Huey (Jeanne Elias), Dewey (Pam Segall) and Louie (E.G. Daily), now rambunctious teenagers no longer under the care of Uncle Scrooge (who is *not* in the show). Donald's girl friend Daisy (Kath Soucie) is now a liberated woman, after the "big scoop" as an entertainment reporter.

Donald's headaches also come from egomaniac anchorman Kent Powers (Roger Rose) and megalomaniac villain Moltoc (voiced by—who else?—Tim Curry). Also appearing is Ludwig Von Drake (Corey Burton), promoting self-help videos.

As if you needed more ducks, Disney is also unveiling *Duck Daze*, starring Donald, Daisy, Huey, Dewey and Louie.

"So many cartoons these days are mean-spirited," producer Kevin Hopps says, "it's refreshing to revive classic Disney characters and place them in new settings with typical problems we all face in the '90s." Aiding Hopps is producer/director Toby Shelton.

To make room for *Mighty Ducks* and *Duck Daze*, *Goof Troop* will leave the Disney Afternoon, and will likely show up on The Disney Channel.

Disney Goes to Canada: After Walt Disney Feature Animation took over the Disney TV Animation's production unit in France, the TV division opened replacement facilities in the Great White North. In January, they opened offices in Toronto and Vancouver, which will focus on OVA (Original Video Animation) production. These projects include *Aladdin and the King of Thieves*; an OVA sequel to *The Lion King*, *Simba's Pride*, for release in 1997; and *The Winnie the Pooh Movie*, an OVA feature for release in 1997. Other projects in development: *Beowulf* and *Frankenstein*.

The Canadian studios in Vancouver and Toronto intend to hire 200 artists: animation directors, animators, in-betweeners, designers, storyboard artists, layout artists, color stylists and digital ink-and-paint operators. For those interested in working at Walt Disney Animation, the recruitment line is (818) 754-7259 some TV experience is preferred. To those who apply–good luck!

Meanwhile, Walt Disney TV Animation in North Hollywood will be working in tandem with their Canadian counterparts, and they will be hiring upwards of 100 artists. The regular switchboard is (818) 754-7100.

***Gargoyles* on Third:** ABC has ordered a new season of 13 episodes, picking up the story where it left off after Episode #65. But the show's creator, Greg Weisman, left his executive producer role after Episode #66. Why? He had been told that Disney was going to have DIC produce *Gargoyles*, which Weisman felt "would be taking a disastrous route." Weisman declined to participate, so Disney hired former *X-Men* story editor Eric Lewald to story-edit the rest of the season. Then, the studio changed its mind, and decided to co-produce the third season with Nelvana of Canada. "Had I known that would happen, I would have stayed on," says Weisman. "I had more stories to tell." The third season will skew in a different direction than what Weisman had in mind. On ABC, it'll be known as *Gargoyles: The Goliath Chronicles*.

—Bob Miller

Look Ma! Hockey-playing ducks who, unbeknownst to the world at large, are also superheroes from another dimension! Thank heavens for the *Mighty Ducks*.

All Duck Art Copyright 1996 Buena Vista Television

COMICS SCREEN

All of these projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse; FR: Film Roman; QDE: Quincy Davis Entertainment; M: Mramax. **Afts. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 2/28/96)

Accident Man. Film. S: Pat Mills, Tony Skinner.

Adventure Man. AN. WB Net.

The Airtight Garage. AN. EP: Kurosawa Ent. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Katsuhiro Otomo. S: Randy Loffcier.

Annie & the Tomorrow Team. AN. TV. Fremantle. Fall '96.

Aquaman. An. WB.

Archie. Film. S: Keith Giglio, Juliet Aires. P: Ben Myron. U.

❑ **Baby Blues.** AN. WB Net.

The Badger. Film/TV. PP.

Barbarella. Film. Nel.

❑ **Barb Wire.** Film. (See article)

❑ **Batman & Robin.** Film sequel. D: Joel Schumacher. S: Akiva Goldsman. W/Chris O'Donnell, Alicia Silverstone, Uma Thurman. WB.

Beavis and Butt-head. AN film. S: Mike Judge.

❑ **Beetle Bailey.** Film. S: Dan Ljoka, Patrick Kopka. P: Bob & Peter Farrelly. Fox.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck.

Biker Mice from Mars. Film. P: Al Ruddy, Andre Morgan, David Chan. S: Greg Johnson.

Black Panther. Film. Col.

Black Widow. TV movie. Fox. S: Mel Friedman, Christopher Cosby.

Blade. S: David S. Goyer. New Line.

Broom Hilda. Film. Fox.

Captain Thunder & Blue Bolt. Film. PP. P: Joe Wizan. Consultants: Roy & Dann Thomas.

Catwoman. Film. S: Dan Waters. WB.

❑ **The Crow: City of Angels.** Film sequel. D: Tim Pope. S: David Goyer. W/Vincent Perez. M. Summer release.

Daredevil. Film. D: Carlo Carlei. S: Carlei, Chris Columbus. P: Ben Myron, Tony Ludwig, Alan Riche. Fox.

Dennis the Menace. Sequel. S: Tim McCanlies.

Dr. Strange. Film. S: David S. Goyer. Col.

Donkey Kong Country. AN series. Nel.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

Dragon Flyz. AN series. Fall '96.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. P: Joe Singer, John Davis. S: Peter Seaman & Jeff Price.

Dungeons & Dragons. Film. S: Topper Lilien & Carroll Cartwright. Sweetpea Ent.

❑ **Earthworm Jim.** Film.

Elfquest. AN film. P: Ed Pressman, Jeremiah Chechik.

Fantastic Four. Film. D: Chris Columbus. S: Michael France. Fox.

Faust. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.

Flash Gordon. Film. S: Steven de Souza. P: Ben Myron, Rick Karo, David Helpern. AN series. Fall '96.

From Hell. Film.

Gen 13. AN film. D: Kevin Altieri. Wildstorm Prods.

Ghost Rider. Film. S: David S. Goyer. Savoy.

Billy Zane rides into adventure as Lee Falk's *Phantom*.

Gothik. Film. P: Jeff Most.

❑ **Green Hornet.** Film. W/Jason Scott Lee. D: Ron Underwood. P: Tom Craig, Mike Richardson. S: Rich Wilkes U. DH.

❑ **Green Lantern.** Film. S: Gary Scott Thompson. WB.

Grimjack. Film.

Hate. AN Film. S: Peter Bagge. Colossal Pictures.

Incredible Hulk. Film. P: Gale Anne Hurd. U.

Iron Man. Film. S: Andrew Chapman. P: John Langley, Elie Cohn, Stephen Chao. EP: Avi Arad, Stan Lee. Fox.

The Jetsons. Film. D: Chuck Russell. S: Scott Alexander, Larry Karaszewski. Turner.

Jonny Quest. Films. New AN series. Fall '96.

❑ **Kull the Conqueror.** Film. P: Raffaella De Laurentiis. W/Kevin Sorbo. U.

Lt. Blueberry. Film.

❑ **Lone Ranger.** Film. Fox.

Lost Universe. Film. M.

Luke Cage. Film. D (& P): John Singleton. S: John Dougherty. P: Ed Pressman.

Machine. Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.

Madman. Film. P: Ben Myron. David Helpern. EP: Mike Allred, Robert Stein. S: Allred. U.

Mark 5. Film. S: William Wisher. Nick Sagan.

The Mask. Film sequel w/Jim Carrey & Cameron Diaz. D: Chuck Russell.

The Men in Black. Film. W/Tommy Lee Jones, Will Smith. Vincent D'Onofrio & Linda Fiorentino. S: Ed Solomon. D: Barry Sonnenfeld. Makeup FX: Rick Baker. Col. AN TV project. Col/Am.

Mike Danger. Film. M.

Mr. Hero. Film. M.

Mr. Magoo. Film. S: Pat Proft. P: Ben Myron. EP: Hank Saperstein. WD.

Modesty Blaise. Film&P: Marcelo Anciano, Michael Berrow. M.

Mutant Chronicles. Film. P: Ed Pressman. S: Philip Eisner.

NeverEnding Story. AN. Nel.

❑ **The New Gods.** AN. S: Dan O'Bannon. WB.

Nexus. AN film. HB.

Nick Fury. TV movie. S: David S. Goyer. Fox.

Peanuts. Film. WB.

❑ **The Phantom.** Film. PP. W/Billy Zane, Kristy Swanson. D: Simon Wincer. S: Jeff Boam.

Pit Bulls. Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.

Plastic Man. Film. D: Geoffrey Wright. WB/Am.

Prince Valiant. Film. S: (D) Anthony Hickox & (P) Carsten Lorenz. Neue Constantin.

Prime. Film. S: John Turman. U.

Prophet. Film. P: Rob Liefeld. TriStar.

The Punisher. NBC TV movie.

Richie Rich. AN series. Fall '96. U/Harvey. LA direct-to-video movie.

Rock City. Film. Blue Turtle.

The Rocky Horror Show. AN series. Nel.

The Saint. Film. D: Philip Noyce. PP.

❑ **Sandman.** Film. D: Roger Avery. S: Ted Elliott, Terry Rossio. P: Oren Koules. Alan Riche, Jon Peters. WB. Filming soon.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. S/D: John Milius. WB.

Scooby Doo. Film. S: Craig Titley. P: Jim Ballantine. Vanessa Coffey. Turner. Atlas.

She-Hulk. CBS.

Silver Surfer. Film. S: John Turman. Neue Constantin. Fox.

Skin Graft. Film. P: Oliver Stone. S: Angel Dean Lopez. WB. Ixtlan.

Spawn. Film. S: Alan McElroy. New Line. AN series. HBO.

The Spectre. AN. WB.

Speed Racer. Film. S: J.J. Abrams. WB.

Spider-Man. Film.

The Spirit. LA & AN projects. P: M. Uslan. B. Melniker.

❑ **Star Blazers.** LA film. TAE Prods. Voyager Ent.

Stretch Armstrong. Film. D: William Dear. S: Mike Werb, Michael Colleary.

Superman. Film. S: Jonathan Lemkin. AN series. WB. W/Kim Daly, Dana Delany.

❑ **Tarzan.** LA TV series. W/Joe Lara. New separate LA film. Fox. D: George Pan Cosmatos. Separate AN film. Disney.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV. Film. S: Christian Ford, Roger Soffer. D: Eric Allard. MPCA.

Terry & the Pirates. TV.

Vampirella. Film.

V for Vendetta. Film. S: Hilary Henkin. P: Joel Silver. WB.

Venom. Film. New Line.

Virus. Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer, Richard Jefferies. P: G.A. Hurd. DH. U.

Wonder Woman. Film. WB.

X. Film. S: Steven Grant. DH. U.

X-Men. Film. P: Lauren Shuler-Donner. Fox.

Yummy Fur. Film. D: Bruce McDonald. Yorktown Prods.

Zen Intergalactic Ninja. Film. D: Brian Yuzna.

Zorro. Film. D: Robert Rodriguez. W/Antonio Banderas. S: Terry Rossio & Ted Elliott.

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